THE UNATTAINABLE

E. W. SAVI

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THE UNATTAINABLE

By the same Author

TREE OF KNOWLEDGE
THE ACID TEST
VAGRANT LOVE
ETC. ETC.

THE UNATTAINABLE

By
E. W.
SAVI

[THIRD EDITION]

HURST & BLACKETT, LTD.
PATERNOSTER HOUSE, E.C.4

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THE UNATTAINABLE

CHAPTER I

FINDING A JOB

To have rich relatives and to be oneself horribly poor, seemed all wrong to Edwina Hope who was realizing her state of poverty with intolerable acuteness after her father's death. Not that she wanted their charity! The very thought of charity meted out to herself by these pompous, purse-proud people, would have humiliated her bitterly. But there were so many things that people with money could do for those not so fortunate as themselves, that it was time someone made a suggestion.

Thinking in this strain for a few days, made Edwina take her courage in both hands and write a letter. It was a difficult letter to write, seeing that these wealthy connections did not even know of her existence, and, had they known, would scarcely have cared to acknowledge the relationship. What had the merchant prince, Sir Thomas Barrington-Onslow, of Onslow and Bainbridge, Limited, Calcutta and Bombay, to do with the daughter of an accountant in a Government office at Rajpahar, in the Himalayas? The appointment did not belong to the covenanted (and coveted) services, so John Joseph Hope had not been considered eligible to be a member of the

Rajpahar Club which gave residents of the station the hall-mark of superiority.

John Joseph Hope, however, had never troubled his head about the Club, as he had always been of a modest and retiring disposition. Not having a superfluity of cash, he had preferred semi-obscurity. Moreover, his contempt for Society women and their hypocrisies had been supreme, and his dread that his motherless daughter should learn their ways, was an obsession with him. He had therefore sent her at an early age to a sister in North London for her education, so that she should see nothing and know nothing of the scandals that floated in the air of that salubrious hill station, and be taught to regard life as a more serious affair. It was not all beer and skittles, as the modern generation was inclined to think, and Edwina had early to learn to become self-supporting.

Having been educated at a High School at moderate cost, she was next sent to a commercial college, where she was turned into a shorthand-typist with an all-round business training. Instead of sending for her to pick up a job in India, her father had advised his sister to find her one in London. He had married again and there was no room for a grown-up daughter in his home; so Mrs. Timson, who was harassed by an ever-increasing family and a husband whose city business was suffering from the depression in trade, was only too glad to continue the guardianship of Edwina and draw two guineas per week for the girl's board and lodging.

It was discovered, however, after some months, that Edwina, with all her efficiency, was never able to keep a position long. With one excuse and another, she was always resigning, or getting dismissed.

When this happened repeatedly, Mrs. Timson grew

impatient and demanded that the father should shoulder his own responsibilities and send for his child. It seemed that Edwina was growing out of hand, being too independent for her years and too attractive for men to leave alone. Had it not been for her strict upbringing, she said, God alone knew what might not have happened! For Edwina had radical ideas and no patience for the psychology of her elders, calling them old-fashioned and narrow-minded. It was her favourite assertion that any girl not a fool could look after herself under most circumstances, and that it was not at all necessary to treat strange men as if she imagined they were wolves in sheep's clothing. She had been convicted of "picking up" men and calling them "acquaintances", so Mrs. Timson felt that it was safest for Edwina to return to her father's care and be guided entirely by her respect for his age and the wisdom of his years.

The result was that Edwina had to work her passage out to India as a child's nurse—a position she filled with credit as she was passionately devoted to children and loved by them, dearly. Nevertheless, as a passenger, she was most unpopular with the ladies through her fatal habit of attracting the men. How it came about that she managed to find favour in men's eyes was a mystery, for there were many girls on the boat far better-looking than she. Be that as it may, by the time her father met her at the jetties, she had refused at least two offers of marriage, and had a host of masculine admirers, all eager to see her to her destination should she be stranded, and to correspond with her indefinitely.

John Joseph rubbed his spectacles when he beheld his daughter, fresh out from home, with English roses in her cheeks and the joy of life shining out of her expressive

eyes. She was as fragrant and sweet as a human flower, and he trembled at the thought of his responsibilities.

However, he did not live long enough to experience the difficulties of his position, for a chill developing pneumonia finished his colourles existence just as his second wife had avowed her determination not to live under the same roof as his "shameless daughter". Edwina was therefore thrown on her ewn resources with a small pension, a stranger in a strange land, and with little hope of finding occupation for her maintenance, but for the knowledge that Sir Thomas Barrington-Onslow was her father's cousin twice removed, and living in opulent circumstances in Calcutta. The second Mrs. Hope had often alluded to these cousins as "stuck up" and "purse proud". She also referred to them as "swells"—a word that gave Edwina a feeling of goose flesh whenever applied to the leisured classes. The Barrington-Onslows moved in the highest society in, what seemed to Edwina, a very different world, and the sight of such wealth gave her many pangs of envy, for she, too, loved beautiful clothes and automobiles, and yearned to be surrounded by art and culture.

There was no use in asking Mrs. Hope for information regarding these exclusive relatives of her father, to whom the latter had never attempted to make himself known. She was told that people of their sort were snobs and had no use for poor relations——

"I used to tell your father that he had no ambition, that he might have been doing well for himself if he had only applied long ago to Sir Thomas for a job in his office. Your father had brains and was good at accounts, so there was no reason why he might not have gone far in accountancy. But he preferred to stay where he was in the

hope of getting a small pension in his old age, so that now I am a pauper and obliged to earn my own living."

"He was very proud," said Edwina, "and, I suppose, hated to force himself on these people."

Nevertheless, though she, too, hated to do so, the fear of becoming homeless and ragged compelled her to send out her S.O.S. to Sir Barrington-Onslow, and every day she watched for the post with anxiety and trepidation.

Mrs. Hope was paid an inadequate sum by an insurance company, after which she found a place as governess in a planter's family and departed, leaving Edwina in a cheap boarding-house to work out her own salvation. Advice costs nothing, so she gave hers freely to the girl, of whose ways she thoroughly disapproved, and whom, she was convinced, would come to a bad end.

"You are too free with men," she said, before retiring to the conveyance on poles which was to carry her down-hill on the shoulders of brawny hillmen. "Nice girls have modest, retiring manners, and never let new acquaintances call them by their Christian names, nor do they show so much leg and say 'damn', which is vulgar, to say the least of it. Men will not respect you, and you will find that they will merely flirt with you; never offer you marriage. So, unless you become very different, you will only get yourself talked about, and end an old maid."

"It is so good of you to warn me," said Edwina sweetly.

"I do so out of sympathy for your dear father who is not here to speak to you of your ways. You were a grievous trial to him, and, I am sure, caused him much uneasiness. Write and let me know if you manage to get work; if not, I can yet write to my friend in Calcutta, the sales manager of Hobson and Wills, to put you into the shop. There is no, reason why you should not make a good shop assistant

if you would only give up your fatal habit of being Jack and Tom with the men."

"I'll drop you a line, never fear. Don't write to your friend unless as a last resort," the girl hastened to add.

Edwina could scarcely live through the days of waiting. It seemed that Sir Thomas Barrington-Onslow had no intention of replying, or why had a week gone by and no notice whatever been taken of her application?

"You don't expect a reply to *that*!" said one of her male "acquaintances", studying a sheet of paper on which she had pencilled a copy of the letter she had written. He had called in the hopes of inducing her to take a walk with him down the hillside to the Botanical Gardens, as Rajpahar was enjoying the brightest of sunny weather, and the silver-capped range to the north was a dazzling sight.

"Why not?" she asked, looking at the written words over his shoulder. "It is always safest to be frank in the beginning. I find it best, in the long run, not to be secretive about oneself. If a man is at all interested, and likely to do anything for one, he is bound to ask a host of questions. So I have saved him the trouble."

"But—um—um—haven't you been a bit—a——"

"Off-hand? I was afraid so, myself, after the letter was posted, but it's done now, and can't be undone."

"It's worse than off-hand, old thing. It's dam' cheek from his point of view. You sort of hold a pistol to his head and say: 'It's your duty to give me a billet in your office, or you are a brute'!"

"Oh, I don't!—how could you put such an interpretation on my unoffending plea for a job?"

"You aren't sufficiently humble, young woman," said he, with a twinkle in his eye. "However, if he does ignore

your letter, you can always fall back on me. I can't offer to do great things as yet, but I dare say, with a reasonable amount of economy, we'd manage to run in double harness."

"Oh, don't, Bill. You are always returning to the charge. I am not wanting a husband, but a job in an office."

"A home of your own is better, surely!"

"I won't marry for a *home*, I have told you so before. A secretarial job is more to my taste."

"Being a wife and mother is the noblest job of all," murmured Bill, determined not to be crushed.

"I have no doubt of it, if one has the vocation, but I have not, so there is no use in talking about it."

"You'll have it all right when you fall in love."

Edwina turned up her nose. "I don't think! A man's got to be a great many impossible things if he wishes to be happy with me. I am not a comfortable proposition as a wife. Unless I love my husband to distraction, I might, out of perversity, fall in love with someone else, and then—the band will begin to play."

"It will be 'God save the King' for the husband, I have no doubt. Poor devil! On second thoughts, we'll stay pals for the present, and see what happens. I haven't the nerve to take such risks. I might commit murder, you know, and get hanged." There was a look of comic resignation in his boyish face as he returned to the study of the copy he held in his hand of Edwina's letter to Sir Thomas Barrington-Onslow. "Let me read this unique epistle again," said he. "I should rather like to preserve it in an album. It would be interesting to know what the big man said when he read it. But how do you know he is not away? The heads of these firms take it by turn to go home."

"I never thought of that!" Edwina's face looked crest-fallen, for it seemed that, after all, she might have to try

for that hateful job of Mrs. Hope's suggesting—serve at a ribbon counter, possibly, or sell hosiery at Hobson's!

Bill Hutchins read aloud with unction:

"To Sir Thomas Barrington-Onslow, K.C.S.I.
Director,
Messrs. Onslow and Bainbridge, Limited,
Calcutta.

"Dear Sir,

"Possibly you will be surprised to hear from me of whose existence you are, doubtless, ignorant. But I shall explain.

"I happen to be your third cousin. The Barrington-Onslows and the Hopes are connected through your mother, she having been a Hope. Such being the case, I am emboldened to ask a favour, because of the old saying 'blood is thicker than water'.

"Please don't think that this is a begging letter, for I don't want money, and would not accept any were you to offer it. What I want is *work*. I am a qualified typist and stenographer and have held secretarial positions at home which I have been obliged to give up for no fault of my own. (This I can explain satisfactorily, if required to do so.)

"I came out to my father three months ago, but he has since died, and I am obliged to work to maintain myself. My certificates (copies of which are enclosed) will guarantee my capabilities. I only beg of you, if you consider giving me a secretarial position, not to let me work for anyone *young*. I would much prefer being with an *old* man.

"Yours faithfully,
"Edwina Hope.

"You rather give things away there. If he has any insight, he'll know that your former bosses have tried to get off with you. Small blame to them," Bill added.

"I don't care, for then he'll make no mistake, and put me with someone old or elderly."

"They are often the worst of all."

"Young men create too many distractions, and it takes one all one's time keeping them in order."

Bill studied her as he would a new specimen. "What's the matter with you that you should be so unimpressionable? I always thought that girls were romantic and susceptible to admiration and flattery."

"I am not any different than they, only I hate a man to think he can take liberties with me because I am drawing pay for typing his correspondence. I enjoy fun, but not promiscuous love-making. To me love is too sacred to play with, so I want no pretences."

"And yet, your hair is red!"

"How stupid you are, Bill!" A glance at the mirror on the wall showed lurid lights on her shingled head, and she smiled. "It's very misleading hair. Don't forget, it's exceptions that prove the rule."

Since she was not inclined for a walk, she watched Bill Hutchins toil up the hill to the Mall wondering a little why it was she could not reward his devotion in the way he wished, but poor old Billie was too much of a doormat to her, and she could never, *never* fall in love with anyone who was eternally at her feet!

CHAPTER II

SCANDAL

EDWINA might never have known William Hutchins but for her fatal habit, deplored by Mrs. Timson and Mrs. Hope, of turning perfect strangers into acquaintances. She did not belong to the Club, where members of both sexes forgathered in the afternoons for tennis and games, nor did she know anyone in the station who could introduce her to a class to which she instinctively felt she belonged; so that the best among the masculine element might have continued to pass her by with the inevitable backward glance, had not a gust of wind on the hillside been friendly to her ambitions, of which more anon.

The circle in which she moved on her arrival from England was middle-class and correct to a point of weariness, from Edwina's angle of vision. They did the things their grandparents had done for generations and echoed their views despite the advance of time and evolution. She was told that it was a liberty if a young man addressed her by her Christian name after he had known her for a short time; she lacked self-respect if he treated her unceremoniously. Ceremony was the god Mrs. Hope's class worshipped, and extremes of fashion were considered immoral. To follow the fashions at all closely, argued a frivolous and empty mind, and too great frankness or freedom of speech and manners, a shocking breach of

decorum amounting to impropriety. Edwina was addressed by her father's friends, young and old, as "Miss Hope", and she was expected to be equally formal. She made no objection in this case, as her father's friends could never be hers, for they viewed life with eyes that saw evil in the simplest of acts, and condemned to perdition all who refused to be hide-bound by custom. She was considered "modern" and "too free", as though to be so were to be regarded as fast and degenerate. They did not understand her, and, in their society, Edwina was bored to extinction.

Naturally, under the circumstances she had preferred her own society in that beautiful hill station where her artistic eye revelled in the glories of Nature; and she would take long walks alone, dreaming of the time which must assuredly arrive, some day, when she would be emancipated from the bondage of poverty and soar into the upper places of the world to which the possession of money was the passport.

Yet money alone was not her god, for she worshipped other ideals linked with money that made all the difference between happiness and misery. It was the nurturing of these ideals that had kept her from being lured by money into the crooked paths in life, concerning which she had had many temptations and opportunities. But for her naturally fastidious mind and purity of thought, they might have proved too strong to resist.

It was during one of her walks on the hill roads that a gust of playful wind swept her hat from her head and hurled it into the arms of a young man approaching her from in front.

When he restored it to her, the smile accompanying her thanks made him her slave for ever. And when she allowed him to turn and walk with her instead of finishing

his constitutional alone, he was greatly intrigued. After that, they met many times and were soon behaving as though they had known each other for years.

One day, mistaking her complaisance for laxity, he kissed her before she was aware of his intention. That he was flirting, she knew, but that her indifference to the fact should be his encouragement to commit an impertinence, very nearly cost him her favour. In scathing terms he was banished and cut thereafter for many days, till his abject shame and apology restored him to her good graces. After that, they were seen about together and Bill Hutchins was asked who was his "lady friend".

Bill's fierce determination never to permit any light treatment of the lady's name earned for Edwina a reputation for self-respect she never lost. Occasionally, Bill was reluctantly obliged to introduce a pal, so Edwina's circle increased. All being members of the Club, it was difficult for her to explain without humiliating herself why she was not also a member.

"When you are poor and can't get heaps of pretty clothes, you can't belong to clubs where your rags will be despised," was her frank reply, when challenged.

She was told that in any old thing she would still be admired and sought after; but that made no difference. It did not take long for the small party to realize the situation when they grew acquainted with Edwina's people in the station. Her father's retiring habits and ill-fitting clothes; her stepmother's prim self-sufficiency and contempt for "snobs", which was her term for all those in a better position than the Hopes; the fact that they belonged to the uncovenanted grades of the Service, settled the question entirely and the boys no longer referred to the Club while helping to give Edwina a good time. She

was of another type altogether to her people, and they agreed among themselves that it was a shame for her to be obliged to suffer for the misfortune of her birth.

When the young men called, either alone or in couples, to take Edwina for a walk or to a matinée, Mrs. Hope's disapproval could be felt.

"It isn't done!" she told Edwina when opportunity offered later in the day. "Your father totally objects to your behaviour. Our friends are all talking of you."

"I am glad to give them something to discuss. Time must hang heavily on their hands, poor things!"

"I should like to know how you have got to know these young men?"

"Mr. Hutchins introduced them."

"Who introduced Mr. Hutchins?"

"What right have you to question me when I am of age?"

"The right of your father's wife who is in the place of your mother," Mrs. Hope returned indignantly. "Who introduced that young fop to you?"

"My hat!" said Edwina with an imperishable sense of humour.

"You are insulting! If all you can do is to make foolish exclamations, you don't improve your case."

"I was merely stating the truth. He saved my hat from blowing down the *khud** and, naturally, we became friends. I fail to see, if a man is quite a good sort, why one should treat him as if he were going to bite."

Of course, it might be imagined that life under her father's roof till he died was anything but a bed of roses for Edwina.

Her lodgings in a cottage overlooking the cart road,

* Precipice

she regarded as a temporary perch on which she had alighted prior to spreading her wings to the sunlight of adventure and romance. She longed for romance, but had sufficient commonsense and judgement not to mistake the pleasing companionship of sentimental youth as an introduction to the great romance of her life. However attentive were the boys, however inclined to be sentimental, her own attitude of complete indifference and frank friendliness encouraged no illusions. Friendship was what she wanted and they gave her of their best. She loved them all with a fine camaraderie that none could mistake, and if Mrs. Hope considered her manners too free with them, they would not have been deprived of that freedom for worlds, or the innocent charm of the companionship would have been lost.

"I am Wendy to their Peter Pan," Edwina would say in reply to her stepmother's lectures. "Or Bill Hutchins as Peter Pan and his pals are the 'Lost Boys', while Rajpahar is our 'Never Never Land'."

What they thought of her was revealed by their eagerness to give up all engagements and leisure to her entertainment. They fought good-naturedly among themselves for a chance to escort her anywhere, and were none of them sorry that she did not move in their set or visit the Club, for then the competition for her favour would have been heart-breaking.

Edwina took their devotion for granted. And why not? She expected the best from them and received it. She gave them her trust and sympathy, talked to them like a sister and stood no kind of nonsense.

Sometimes, when she was with one or other of her satellites on the public road and they passed a rickshaw with a lady who bowed to the raised hat of her companion,

she would be told the history of the fashionable one, and often it was inclined to be scandalous. In this way, without encouraging gossip, Edwina learned to know many Society women by sight, and became familiar with their amours; for it seemed the fashion for women whose husbands were in the plains to annex the devoted attendance of some admirer who, apparently, found it far more amusing and less compromising to flirt with a married woman than a young girl. They knew that they were safe from matrimonial possibilities, Bill remarked caustically, having himself proposed to Edwina for weeks.

She was learning, in this wise, all the wickedness and mischief which idleness and wealth encouraged, and had much to think about in the evenings when she brooded on her poverty alone.

She had a personal interest in a particular Society beauty whom Bill did not greet as he had never been introduced, and occasionally they met on the Mall while the lady was either on horseback with an attentive companion riding beside her, or in her rickshaw with the same man walking alongside. They did not notice her, but she was fascinated by them, for the lady was very lovely, with the face and expression of an ingenuous child; the man well-made and extraordinarily attractive, though not exactly handsome.

One day, when she was quite alone and had turned the corner of the hillside in a lonely spot, she came across the two seated on a rug on the grass, the woman locked in the man's arms. They had not heard her light footsteps, and, judging the place deserted, had given their feelings rein. At some distance their horses, tethered to a stump on the bank, were waiting patiently for their return.

Deeply embarrassed, Edwina turned back and disappeared

as fast as she could, but not before she had met the man's eyes full. He, too, seemed embarrassed. The woman did not see Edwina at all, her eyes being hidden in her lover's breast.

The vision, or tableau, haunted Edwina for some time, particularly as there was the sordid side to the picture—a husband working in the plains, full of trust in his wife's honour, and she prostituting it in such fashion! It was revolting, and did more towards supplying a moral lesson to like situations than any amount of lectures from her stepmother.

She discussed it afterwards with Billie Hutchins, who was bitter against women who had no moral sense.

"Why should you blame her more than him?" Edwina cried, disposed to hold the scales of judgement evenly.

"Because she is married and he is not. It is a positive fact that no fellow in the world would go to such lengths with a woman unless encouraged. He wouldn't dare—take it from me. Take my own case. When I first knew you, I was on for a lark. Honest injun, I thought you wouldn't mind a flirtation—heaps don't, and I tried it on, but you treated me as I deserved, and my respect for you rose a hundredfold when you sacked me there and then—telling me in plain language to go to the devil——"

"I am sure I was not so vulgar!"

"Not at all. You made me understand it, jolly well. So the result is you have me fast. Here I am, and here I'll be till you say: 'Bill, I've changed my mind; let's marry'."

"I don't see the need of this digression, unless it is a way to work in a proposal again?" said Edwina, with

a twinkle in her eye. "If you remember, we were discussing Mrs. Bainbridge and Captain Dysart. I am tremendously interested. Go ahead and tell me all you know about both."

"I am ashamed to say I know nothing whatever about her, for she came to Rajpahar after I got to know you, and I never troubled to find out anything about her."

"But she's lovely!"

"The belle of Rajpahar, every season, I believe. But she's married, and that's enough for me. Nothing doing, as far as I am concerned."

"And what about Captain Dysart?"

"Least said soonest mended. He's a man I hope you will never get to know."

"Why? Now, you should know that that is the surest way to pique one's interest!"

"I can't satisfy your unwholesome thirst for scandal in this case, for I don't know the blighter. He's a sort of Don Juan in Rajpahar, one would think, the way the women go all out for him. They're ready to tear each other's eyes out to get him to themselves, and Mrs. Bainbridge is the most unpopular woman in the place."

"Nothing would please me better than to have a chance of taking down the conceit of such a man a peg or two!" said Edwina.

"No one can do it. If you cold-shouldered him, he'd leave you alone and find other game. You're all 'game' to him. He's a heartless *roué*, if you want the truth, and gets away with his misdemeanours every time. Because he is wealthy and good-looking and in a crack regiment, he's run after and spoilt to the hilt."

Captain Dysart's face haunted her for a long time—his startled eyes as they looked back at her while Mrs. Bainbridge's face lay hidden in his breast, her arms round his neck.

She, however, forgot all about the two after her father's death, and the fact that she was face to face with dire poverty unless she could find work to do.

CHAPTER III

THE JOB

oon after Bill Hutchins's criticism of her letter to the reat Sir Thomas Barrington-Onslow, Edwina was peeding to the plains, having at last been called to n interview at the office in Calcutta.

She was thrilled to think that the office was according er this interview, for it meant that her letter had had fect. The junior partner of the firm desired her presence, nd she was filled with excitement to think that it as sure to lead to something for her. Sir Thomas, ne "snob", had taken no notice of the letter, but at ny rate he had passed it on to someone else to deal ith. It was hateful to feel that the head of the firm ould think she had tried to scrape up an acquaintance ith him! but if she ever had the chance, she would prove at that was not the case. She would be faithful to er duties, and he might ignore her existence, if he eased.

The journey was accomplished without incident, first the mountain railway which wriggled along the cart ad on the downward grade, skirting precipices and gging the hillsides, and then in the mail train, com-ared with which the other might have been a toy, and lcutta was reached in due course, with Edwina in a xi, driving to a family hotel. It was the hotel her

father always patronized, as the charges were within his means.

The heat was oppressive after the cool air in the hills and dust lay thick on the parched trees and objects by the wayside. If she was given a job in the office, she knew that the heat would take all the life out of her and whiten her cheeks like those of the Europeans she saw in the streets. But that could not be helped. The main thing was that she would have to work for a living. How resentful Bill and the "lost boys" had been because of her going! They were sure she would be ill and utterly disillusioned. Calcutta was all right in the cold weather, but in the summer months it was—unspeakable! "You'll get sunstroke," said one. "You'll get enteric," said another. "You'll simply pine to come back to us," said a third. But Edwina refused to be discouraged.

When it was dark, she went for a stroll across the common, which she was told to call the "Maidan", and saw the river, and the gardens where the band played, and the carriages and cars of fashionable Calcutta collected for their occupants to be entertained. Arc lights turned the lawn beside it into daylight, and Edwina saw ladies, smartly dressed, walking together and with men; and children at play, with nurses in attendance.

Though most of Society had gone to various hill-stations for the summer, it seemed that there were plenty of ladies still left in the city, who took an airing in the cool of the evening when the sea breeze coming up the river made life more endurable. If these women could support the life, she was sure she could. She revelled in her friendlessness, for her thoughts were her companions, and she had so much to plan. She had been warned that the Indians might be insolent, but none molested her, and she felt

s safe in those wide streets teeming with Oriental humanity as in London.

The following morning at eleven she called at he office in a busy thoroughfare—a whitewashed building vith deep windows and a flat roof—and was admitted by a ouggareed peon, and conducted to a waiting-room, where he had to possess her soul in patience till she could be eceived by the junior partner of the firm.

She felt just a little shaky about the knees when, at ength, she was taken to the private room of the junior partner, and found herself greeted formally by a square-built, dignified gentleman whose eyes seemed to read ier very soul. They had a keen and piercing quality vhich Edwina imagined must strike terror into the inderstrappers and bottlewashers of the firm. He was iot young, but in the prime of life, clean-shaven and quare-faced, his hair lightly streaked with grey. On the vhole, by the time she had recovered her courage, she hought she rather admired him.

"Sit down," said he, pleasantly. "I hope you had a ileasant journey."

"It was quite comfortable in spite of the heat," said he.

"I wish to correct an error you have been labouring inder," he began, with twitching lips and lowered lids vhile his fingers toyed with a file full of letters. "You ssumed that you were related to Sir Thomas Barrington-Onslow. It happens that he is in no way connected vith you."

Edwina half-rose in her chair, the blood suffusing her heeks. What was he thinking of? As if she did not know vhat she had been talking about! "But—surely—" she roke off catching sight of a glint of amusement in his

eyes. "Perhaps you think I made it up?" She was both angry and humiliated. It was mean if he had called her all that long way just to "correct her mistake", as he regarded her claim of relationship. As if she cared if she were related or not!

"I am sure not. You have only been misinformed—and the mistake was quite natural——"

"I assure you," Edwina broke in, "I have been brought up in the belief that my father was a cousin—a distant cousin—of Sir Thomas. My father was John Joseph Hope," she explained earnestly, her eyes large and deprecating. "Lady Onslow's family name was 'Hope'. Surely you know that? Her father and my father's——"

With a quiet gesture Mr. Bainbridge silenced her, his face carved in stone. "That was what you have been told. The Barrington-Onslow whose mother's maiden name was Hope, is a cousin of Sir Thomas. There were two brothers, originally. Sir Thomas belongs to a different branch, consequently he is no connection. However, he did not give me your letter for me to tell you so, but to write and explain that there is no position in this office which he can offer you." Edwina's face fell visibly. "The work is done by youngsters from home and Bengali baboos. I sent for you on my own initiative as I think you might prove useful to me. I am not too sure, mind you, but, instinct—call it so if you like—tells me that I shall not be making a mistake if I employ you—not here—but at my home. I shall endeavour to make myself clear," as Edwina's expressive eyes showed anxiety and surprise. He squared his already wide shoulders, and, crossing one leg over the other, turned to her in order to study her while conversing. "I am engaged upon a work which I think of some importance to commerce in this

country, since the economic and political conditions dating from the War have changed. I am in need of someone to work under my direction, type for me, take down to dictation, and edit what has already been dictated, for which reason someone of a sound commercial education will suit me best of any. I am at home during the week-ends—that is, at my place in the hills, so that every week I shall be able to leave you enough to work upon till I come again. What do you think of that?"

Edwina was dubious. "I—I should like to hear more of the position—your home—*yourself*—" she lifted brave eyes to his and did not flinch when he stared back at her, surprised at her impudence.

It was a surprise to her when he said irrelevantly:

"What is your speed?"

"I can take down at a hundred and twenty, but I find that eighty is usually required of a stenographer in an office. Reporters, perhaps——"

"You have not had a happy experience of employers, generally?" said he, with a hint of a smile on his lips and in the lines near his eyes. "At any rate, I am not young—in fact, old enough to have recovered from the follies of youth. Moreover, I have a wife."

His tone ruffled her, and she longed to make a sharp retort, when she remembered he was only referring to her letter to Sir Thomas.

"This is my wife," said he, pulling open a drawer in his table and taking out a studio portrait of a very beautiful woman. "Perhaps you have seen her at Rajpahar—possibly, you have met her?"

Edwina took the photograph and glued her eyes to the beautiful face, glad to hide the thrill of her surprise.

So much had happened of late, that she had all but forgotten that the name of the lady who had set tongues wagging at Rajpahar was Bainbridge. The shock was discomposing. Of course, Mr. Bainbridge was one of those confiding husbands who trusted his wife and believed her all that was virtuous and good!

"I do not know the lady," Edwina murmured truthfully. "How beautiful she is!"

He smiled queerly. "To be the husband of such a lovely lady you think a proud distinction?"

"I could imagine that it would be hard not to worship her. How young she is!"

"Sixteen years younger than myself." He took the photograph out of her hand, studied it for a moment with a curl of the lip, then put it back in the drawer. "I propose," he continued in a leisurely way, "to send you to my home as my secretary. I take it that my wife will be glad of your companionship, for she is alone but for the kid and his Indian nurse. If the arrangement is not pleasing to her, it will make no difference, for you will not be at all in her way. My wife is fond of society and is out a great deal. Anyhow, it is my intention to employ you in the dual capacity of secretary to myself and companion to her, so I shall hope for the best. Your footing will be as one of the family, and I trust you will be able to accompany my wife, if she desires it, wherever she may go."

"And if she does not desire it?" Edwina's heart leapt at the prospect of entering Rajpahar Society, at last, under the wing of Mrs. Bainbridge. But it was not possible that the lady would care to have a stranger always with her!

"In that case, you will, I dare say, find your own

musements, for all work and no play isn't good for nyone. Ordinarily speaking, you should be a godsend o my wife." He went on to talk of salary, and Edwina ound him more than generous. "I comprehend the act that you will require all of it in a station like Rajpahar, if you are to dress as becomes anyone who ust live beside my wife. She herself makes clothing high art, and it would be positively painful for her o see you dowdy—not that I am casting any reflection n your appearance," he added, while Edwina crimsoned, or the suit she was wearing was her best, and even then, eing navy serge, it was getting shiny at the seams. The great thing is, you would convey what you are, ven in rags, but you are not half a girl if you do not like o be well-dressed. For that reason, I am advancing you oney on account. If it is not enough, please apply to e for more. You will see that I am counting on your oing about with my wife, and am not blind to your ecessity."

Edwina thought him wonderfully kind, and thanked im gratefully. She did not know men could be so houghtful of a woman's needs, but being married, his yes had been opened in that respect.

"I hope Mrs. Bainbridge will like me," said she, arnestly.

"I think her taste will be at fault if she does not," e replied courteously.

Inwardly, Edwina was living over again the moment hen she had turned the bend of the hill road and come pon that unforgettable tableau on the bank—the grass elving to the road beneath a wall of mountain, and wo people locked in each other's arms. She was very lad that she had not been seen by Mrs. Bainbridge,

or it would have been impossible for her to have accepted this ideal post. Captain Dysart had probably forgotten the event entirely and would scarcely recognize in herself and her smarter appearance the girl who had "caught him out", as the boys would say.

So this was Mrs. Bainbridge's husband who worked in the plains while she played in the hills. And he was quite an attractive fellow! What was the woman about not to know the folly of pulling her own house about her ears?

In the meantime, words Mr. Bainbridge was speaking held her attention. He was telling her that Mrs. Bainbridge was Sir Thomas's daughter—an only child whom Bainbridge had watched grow up.

Sixteen years older!—he had, indeed, taken a risk!

Edwina could fill in the gaps in the story, and see how the old man must have persuaded his child, who was then fancy-free, to take his partner for her husband and so strengthen the finances of the firm; also, keep the riches in the family. She, baby-face, knew little of life and was glad, possibly, to please the old man. Then had come Jack Dysart, and love—or was it passion? Both, perhaps. Infatuation, undoubtedly, or she would not care so little about her good name and allow it to be a byword in the mouths of all Rajpahar Society.

"You will accept the billet?" Bainbridge asked, rising as she rose, and offering to shake hands.

"Gladly. I feel I shall like it very much, if you think I will be able to undertake it."

"I am sure of it." He shook her warmly by the hand, and Edwina left, feeling as if she were walking on air.

She cashed her cheque and spent a joyous day selecting underwear to suit her taste, and pretty clothes in which

she would feel the equal of any of the fine ladies she might chance to meet at the Bainbridges's villa. It was wonderfully understanding of Mr. Bainbridge to have made it possible for her to be well-dressed, and she felt happier than she had been for years, though, being in mourning, she was obliged to confine her aspirations to black.

All the way back to Rajpahar, she was calling herself the luckiest of girls and thanking the inspiration which had made her write that daring letter. Things came about just as if someone was pulling the strings, so to speak—and, perhaps, Someone was! Instead of having to serve behind a counter at Hobson and Wills', she, Edwina Hope, was actually going into smart society. It was almost like a fairy tale.

When she arrived at the cottage, she packed her articles of value and threw away her old clothes with a leaping heart, for never again would she have to feel the humiliation of wearing such worn-out garments; cotton underwear, and stockings that had been darned out of all recognition in the feet! Her dresses were no longer of use, and given to the landlady's daughter. Thoroughly pleased with life, she sat down to write to her stepmother, and might be excused if a hint of triumph persisted in appearing between the lines.

"I have managed to get a job on my own, and at Rajpahar, for the summer. In the winter I shall be with the Bainbridges in Calcutta. I am to be Mr. Bainbridge's secretary and his wife's companion, if she needs me. The pay is beyond all expectations, so I think I have fallen on my feet." The postscript told Mrs. Hope the truth concerning the supposed relationship between the Onslows and the Hopes, so that the widow would never again

speak to her intimates of her late husband's "swell relations in Calcutta".

The following day, she telephoned Bill Hutchins of her good fortune, and an hour later was discussing it with him as they strolled along the Mall, very conscious of looking her best in a new summer coat.

Unfortunately, though Bill was delighted to have her back in the station, he did not at all approve of her position under the Bainbridge roof.

"I don't trust those people," said he. "You never can tell. She is flirting like blazes with Jack Dysart, and her husband is probably going his own way. That way will be in your direction, if you don't look out. He is probably fed up with his wife, as they say she is brainless, and your admiration for him will only end in your falling in love out of pity for his loneliness."

"What a fool you must take me for!"

"Well—what is he so generous for? Why should he want you to live in his house? His wife is not behaving properly, so she will be the last to object to her husband casting soft eyes at his secretary."

"You've got a debased mind, Bill, and can't get away from thoughts of evil. Chuck it, old thing. I'm jolly lucky, and you know it. Girls don't find such jobs growing on trees."

"Well, I only hope you'll keep clear of trouble. Evil communications corrupt good manners, so look out that your ideals don't get lowered. You'll see enough happening to open your innocent eyes, I'll bet. If Mrs. Bainbridge is not that gunner-fellow's mistress, she soon will be. She's daft about him, and he's not the sort to deny himself the joys of an intrigue. Wait and see for yourself."

"What a pity she is so foolish! Someone should influence her."

"At this stage, an angel from Heaven couldn't."

Edwina stopped before the villa on the Mall, owned by the Bainbridges, and was full of admiration for its picturesque charm. The houses at Rajpahar were very like houses in the country at home, and Edwina felt greatly enchanted as she gazed up at this one, particularly because of its gables and chimneypots, its glass veranda, and guillotine windows. Mr. Bainbridge had had it built on the plan of one he owned in Hampshire, and it was the prettiest at Rajpahar, standing above a steep *khud* with a glorious view of the Everlasting Snows from its north windows. The window-boxes were ablaze with scarlet geraniums, and the ferns and begonias were an entrancing sight. A flower garden spread on both sides as far as the restricted space would allow, and Edwina thought it perfection; but Billie, who was in a captious mood and determined not to like anything belonging to the Bainbridges, said it was too much exposed to wind and weather, and too near the edge of a precipice for safety.

"Since this part of Rajpahar is built on a spur," said Edwina, "there is, at least, no fear of a hillside falling upon the house."

"What's to prevent a landslip carrying it to the bottom of the valley?" he retorted.

Edwina shuddered. "You *are* comforting to-day!"

"Oh, well, there are worse things than landslides!" He drew her away, determined not to stand a moment longer admiring the Bainbridge property. "If you are going to live there presently, you'll have enough of it, so no use wasting my precious time."

CHAPTER IV

THE VILLA BAINBRIDGE

At last, on the appointed morning, Edwina made her way to the villa on the Mall. A servant in livery with a neatly tied turban took her card and after awhile ushered her into the morning-room where Mrs. Bainbridge was seated. For a second or two she had a species of stage fright to think that she was actually in the presence of the beautiful woman of whom all Rajpahar was gossiping, but whom no one dared to slight because of her husband's attitude in the matter, and his reputed wealth. Edwina was learning that wealth covered a multitude of sins.

"Miss Hope?" Mrs. Bainbridge rose, smiling seraphically, her hand extended. "I am delighted to make your acquaintance." It was said with so much frank sincerity and kindness and no trace of condescension, that Edwina was immediately won. "My husband, who arrived last evening, is out riding at present, but he prepared me for your coming. How nice of you to promise to work for him. He is so full of ambition for this book, and so sure you will be of great assistance to him. I admire your courage, for I don't understand a thing about it, from A to Z!" and she laughed, showing pretty, white teeth and an infantile dimple in her cheek. "But how I chatter! Do sit down, or should I show you to your room?"

"Do chatter," said Edwina, feeling years older, though she knew that Mrs. Bainbridge was at least twenty-five. "I am enjoying the sound of your voice."

"How flattering!" She blushed like a schoolgirl. "I have been told by many that I should sing, but, somehow, I don't. The thing is, I have to be discouraged, not encouraged, as I usually talk a pack of nonsense." Her laugh was delightfully childish, and Edwina thought she did not look or behave as if she were a day over eighteen. How pretty she was with her flawless skin, her limpid blue eyes, the rose-flush in her cheeks and the slim gracefulness of her figure. Who would believe that she was the mother of a boy of four! Her heart fluttered romantically at the thought of Captain Dysart's infatuation for her. Could he help himself?

Mrs. Bainbridge refused to chatter any more and led the way to Edwina's room, which looked out on the rugged grandeur of giant mountains and snow-capped peaks with gossamer clouds nestling at their sides. On lower levels, she saw cottages with tin roofs and roofs of red tiles, dotted over the surface of green slopes; she saw tea bushes in serried lines, and lower still, the roofs of tea houses.

"How gorgeous!" she exclaimed.

"It is a lovely view. I hope you will like it here."

"I know I shall love it! Thank you ever so much."

"Why should you thank me? It is I who should thank you for coming."

"But—I am not a guest!—I am earning my living. It is horrible to be poor!"

Mrs. Bainbridge was instantly sympathetic. "I feel so sorry for those who are badly off and obliged to work. I often wonder what I should have done a few years ago

f the business had failed and I had been obliged to vork. I should starve, for I couldn't work. I am too tupid."

"You were born to marry! I can't see you earning your living in business!"

"Poor you! Why aren't you married? I am sure you have had lots of chances."

"I haven't the vocation, I suppose. Besides—I don't care enough for any man to be his wife."

Mrs. Bainbridge's face grew suddenly depressed, her expression petulant. "You are right. Never marry until you have found the right man."

"That's how I feel. This is such a charming room," she said to change the subject. And so it was, in its English furnishing. She was told that the room beyond was the day nursery, and Mrs. Bainbridge gave her a glimpse of it. "Bizzy", the little son, was out for an airing with his Indian nurse, so she did not make his acquaintance till later. The nursery was a child's paradise, full of delightful toys, and beyond it lay the boy's bedroom. Edwina learned that the Madrasi *ayah* who had looked after the child since his birth, slept on the floor of the nursery, as it was not customary for Indian servants to be provided with beds. She was perfectly content, as she had never in her life slept in a bed, her roll of padded quilt and blankets being a portable couch.

When the two ladies returned to the morning-room, which was the cheeriest in the house, Mrs. Bainbridge prattled of Rajpahar and the gaieties scheduled for the season. She provided cigarettes, and they smoked while Edwina was regaled with all she would have to expect since she had come to live with the Bainbridges. She was to remember that although she was engaged to work on

stacks of manuscripts, she was also to be companionable in her leisure hours, and get a good time.

"It must have been very dull for you these past months not to have joined in anything!" Mrs. Bainbridge regarded it as nothing less than a calamity. "How did you exist?"

Edwina was quite frank about her circumstances and received even more sympathy.

"I couldn't have lived such a life!" Mrs. Bainbridge cried. "I wish I had known you before."

Truly, Mrs. Bainbridge is anything but a snob! thought Edwina.

"Never mind! We will have to make it up to you. You are not the type of girl I imagined worked in offices at typing jobs. You are more one of us."

"I hope you will always like me," said Edwina.

"Of course I shall. You strike me as a girl who must compel notice wherever you may be. You carry yourself so well. I now remember it must have been you I sometimes passed on the roads with a tall, fair boy who sports a budding moustache."

"That is my friend, Willie, or *Billie* Hutchins, as he is called."

"You see, I remember him only because I was attracted to look at you, Miss Hope. Only, the hat makes a difference, and I was put off seeing you without."

"Call me Wina—a corruption of Edwina. It's the name by which I am known."

"I should love to."

They grew very friendly and Edwina knew that, before long, she would have Mrs. Bainbridge's entire confidence. The latter was just a girl, longing for another girl in whom to confide, and with whom to share her joys and sorrows.

"It's so lovely to think that you will be here to-morrow and the day after, and all the days of the season!" she cried childishly. "I am rather lonely in the house—outside, I have a host of friends and one very special companion. I shall introduce you to him," she babbled on. "But I hope I am not boring you? I fear I talk too much—but here is Basil." Instantly her face fell, and Edwina hoped that if ever she married she would never have to look as Mrs. Bainbridge looked on the approach of her husband. Her pretty face seemed to put on a mask, her eyes to grow cold and tired.

Mr. Bainbridge stepped in from the veranda looking the acme of vitality and vigour. His tread was firm and assured, his deep-set eyes as keen as ever. Edwina thought his square-jawed face suggested a will of iron and a fine self-control, though the permanent, vertical lines between his brows indicated a temper, ready and fierce. Yet his smile was at once kind and disarming; the grip of his hand, for her, hearty and reassuring.

"So you have already made friends? I did not tell you, Pearle, that Miss Hope was under the impression she was a sort of cousin of yours a few times removed," said he, mischievously, "and 'blood being thicker than water', she did not see why your dad should let her want for a job!"

"How can you humiliate me so!" cried Edwina, her face suffused with colour.

"Oh, do tell me all about it!" said Mrs. Bainbridge sympathetically. "I do wish it were true!"

"Your husband will be the best person to explain, since he has been so cruel as to mention it."

Mr. Bainbridge laughed, then melted with contrition. "Don't take it so seriously. I have only been teasing.

The fact is, that letter of yours breathing individuality and originality, and everything other applications for jobs never do, captured Sir Thomas, and so appealed to me that—I simply had to send for you to satisfy myself that you were all I imagined. I need someone with spirit and the courage of her convictions, initiative, and all that, to help me with my work."

"And was the interview satisfactory?"

"My instinct was unerring. I shall depend on you for an honest criticism. I shall hope to be pulled up and made to express myself lucidly—my spelling overhauled, my punctuation rectified. I dare say you will find your work dull and me a terrible bore, but my wife will make up for all your annoyances, I am sure."

He then produced and read Edwina's letter to his wife, as it was among the letters and notes he carried in a wallet. When he had finished, he held out his hand to Edwina, his tone full of raillery: "Shake hands, and say you don't mind?"

Edwina shook hands, bubbling with laughter. "Promise never to refer to it again!"

"I promise faithfully never to mention the subject again!"

Mrs. Bainbridge smiled a blessing on the ritual and the conversation was changed. Bainbridge helped himself to a cigar from a box on a table and talked to his wife of the station and the people he had met while out riding. He had called in at the men's club and found it full even at that early hour. It was surprising what a lot of fellows were up for the week-end—like himself. By the way—he had heard that Dysart was away, bear shooting. The blighter is always away at these shoots, so that no one had a chance of fixing up anything with him.

Basil Bainbridge would have liked nothing better than a shoot this week-end.

"Why didn't you get him to wait and meet me?" he asked his wife, fixing her suddenly with suspicious eyes.

"Me? What have I to do with it?" she returned, the colour rising in her cheek.

"A devilish lot, I should think, seeing that he's always here. I dare say he wasn't keen," and he gave an unpleasant laugh.

Edwina saw that he was inclined for plain speaking, and feeling in the way, grasped at the first chance of flight. Oh, these married couples!

"Is that your little boy?" she asked Mrs. Bainbridge, as an *ayah* and child entered the gate, the former dressed after the custom of women of Madras. "I must make friends."

The door closed behind her and she sped after the two who were entering the house. Meeting them in the glazed veranda, Edwina knelt on the floor and drew the friendly little fellow into her arms. He was a beautiful boy, with his mother's wide-apart eyes, and cherub face framed in sun-gold locks.

"Who am I?" she asked, smiling affectionately into the blue eyes.

"Oo's 'nother aunty."

"Oh, you delicious darling! Say 'Wina'."

"Ena."

"Kiss Ena."

He condescended to obey thoughtfully. "Oo's got a pitty face."

"Thank you. I appreciate that! Shall I come and play with you?"

This suited "Bizzie" completely, and clutching her

fingers he toddled away to the nursery to introduce her to his toys. Edwina sat on the carpet and made a trail of animals marching, two and two, into a palatial ark. Frequently Bizzie's idea of precedence differed from hers, and changes had to be effected.

In the midst of it all, a movement at the door showed Mr. Bainbridge leaning against the framework, watching proceedings with weary eyes out of which all the intensity seemed to have gone. A glance at him showed an expression of discontent and satire, and she was sorry for the change. Evidently, his conversation with his wife had proved annoying.

"How soon can you spare me some of your leisure?" he asked, ready for work; the first time that Edwina had not been treated by an employer as an employee.

"I am at your service whenever you need me," said she, springing to her feet.

"I thought, if it's all the same to you, we'll talk business in my study. I have the manuscripts there. As I have an afternoon engagement, I'll give you something to do so as not to lose time."

"I am quite ready," said Edwina.

Bainbridge led the way and introduced her to his study, a cosy room full of books and easy-chairs, with a desk at which Bainbridge usually worked when at home. It was just sufficiently untidy not to be disorderly, and very English in its aspect, with a bay window looking out on the Mall and on a crazy flagged path leading to the gate. Tall firs whispered in the breeze, and a range of blue hills and distant green valleys could be glimpsed through their spreading branches. The air blowing in at the open casement was fresh and life-giving. If all India

were like Rajpahar, Edwina thought there could be no more desirable place under the sun.

Bainbridge unlocked a new portable typewriter which he had bought for her use, and together they made themselves familiar with its mechanism. "This is to be yours, and this room your private den. You won't mind my using it with you, for we shall work a great deal together," said he.

"I shall enjoy it," said Edwina. "And where is the book?"

He then opened a drawer and produced a pile of manuscript. "I want you to go through what is here, at your leisure, and type it after you have made your technical corrections. You'll find that I am a bad speller and that my ideas of punctuation leave much to be desired. You being latest from school, will know more than I on these points. Whenever I can spare the time, I'll dictate more stuff from where I left off, and that you can deal with when I am out. If you should disapprove of the way in which I have expressed myself, make a marginal note, and we'll tackle it together. I hope I am not alarming you?"

"Not at all. It happens that English is my strong subject—grammar and spelling, so I think I might be of use."

"Good. I am glad to have you edit my stuff, for I may be full of ideas and have something to give the world to think about and adopt, but I'm hanged if I have any style or grace in literature. I often get myself tied up into knots over grammar when I compose involved sentences, and play the devil with my verbs. Now, don't go and kill yourself over the work. I am in no hurry, and I want you to have a good time when you can. I am sure a girl of your age loves games and dancing——"

"Being in mourning," she ventured, "I shall not be going out to any dances."

"There are heaps of things you'll enjoy even if you cut dances. You may wonder," he said hesitatingly, "why my wife doesn't help me in my work? The fact is, she isn't cut out for this kind of thing. It's the way she was brought up. She hasn't the least interest in work of any kind, and, like an eternal child, believes all the world is her playground. Besides, she would not be able to take down dictation fast enough in long-hand, knowing nothing of short-. Even my handwriting is a Chinese puzzle to her, she says, and she scarcely reads one word in ten." He spoke with a great deal of bitterness.

"That is, perhaps, because you write an illegible hand. So many men take no trouble to write clearly."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Nor do I blame her for wanting to play and not work. It is the fault of having too much money and everything given to her. I would be the same in her place. We work only because we must."

"I see you are going to be very loyal to *her*!" he remarked with a hint of resentfulness in his tone. "Where do I come in?"

"I shall be loyal to you both," said Edwina, with a charm all her own.

"You admire my wife?"

"I am in love with her! She is very sweet. Very attractive."

"H'm!—other people think so, too, you will discover. Shall I give you a bit of dictation?"

Edwina was ready, so the morning passed in earnest application to work, the thought once passing through her mind that a wife would need to be very indifferent

not to care how long and how often her husband remained closeted in his study with a young girl.

Bainbridge tried her nerves sorely and she found it difficult to concentrate, for he had the habit of composing while striding about the room with his hands in the pockets of his trousers or behind his back. Occasionally, his back was turned and he was looking out of the window, when his words were completely lost. Once she laid down her pencil and leaned back in her chair to wait till he was more at ease and intelligible.

"Hullo! What's that for? Tired already?" frowning irritably because so much of his expressed thought was wasted.

"No. Only disgusted," she returned, equally put out.

"Wh-what the dickens—I mean—please explain."

"I mean that no stenographer on God's earth would be of any use to you while you talk with your back turned and your head buried in your chest." Her imperishable spirit of independence looked back at him out of a pair of extraordinarily beautiful eyes. Her eyes were her best feature and infinitely arresting.

"I—I beg pardon—but you're a very impudent young woman!" A whimsical smile curved his lips. "Thanks, however, for the correction. Now that you've shattered all my ideas, I'll stop for the present. Carry on with all you have before you. I'll be off."

With that, he was gone, and Edwina laughed heartily, surprised that he had not been roused to ferocious anger.

CHAPTER V

HUSBAND AND WIFE

EDWINA saw very little of the Bainbridges together that week-end. Mr. Bainbridge kept her busy part of the day with his book, looking occasionally into the study to dictate, or to inspect her work. At meals, she noticed that his eyes often dwelt on his wife's lovely face, but there was no great tenderness in them, only a gleam of satire or a shade of resentment. When he was not giving them news or commenting on the doings at Rajbari, he was inclined to bait his wife sarcastically, till her replies were impatient and cross.

It was awkward for Edwina, being a third at the table and having to pretend that all was well. It was not well, for she soon divined the lack of sympathy between husband and wife, her mere tolerance of him, and his contemptuousness of her. Her beauty had evidently ceased to appeal to him—or was he a good actor and determined no longer to sue for his wife's favours? Edwina detected a vein of jealous suspicion whenever he dwelt on the subject of his wife's doings all the week. He purposely introduced Captain Dysart's name just to see the effect on her face; and she, childish creature, incapable of camouflage, never failed to rise to his bait.

On the whole, it was more agreeable to Edwina to apply herself that week-end strenuously to the

manuscripts; or to spend her leisure in playing with the boy.

"How do you get along?" Mr. Bainbridge once asked her. She had not been aware of his entry, or that he had been watching her at work for quite a while.

"Rather slowly. It's your handwriting, and the same mistakes cropping up every now and again."

"Mistakes? I warned you I cannot spell."

"Worse than that. You keep splitting your infinitives and putting the cart before the horse."

"Good God! What on earth does that mean?"

Edwina laughed, and he sat down beside her.

"Let me see——"

She pointed out a passage: "The verb 'to be'. This is *you*—a fair sample! 'To *really* be of any use, you must'—" She met his eyes reproachfully. "Here's another case: 'To *finally* impress on your', et cetera."

"I see. Unpardonable! Thanks. How slipshod we get! Of course, I know it is bad—bad!—but I did not realize it was splitting what-you-may-call-'ems. What an ignoramus you must think me?" His eyes twinkling. "Many mistakes in spelling?"

"Loads, especially when it had to be a double 'l' or an 'ence' and an 'ance'. You are hopeless. Didn't you ever learn Latin and Greek?"

"Never. I played games in school," he answered guiltily. "My favourite subjects were maths. and science, and I took honours in them. Nothing else mattered. We learn far more out of school than in it. However, I'm learning from you."

"You can't, for I know very little beyond the most ordinary things." As his eyes were curiously soft and

caressing, she took warning by previous experience, and switched his mind on to the business of the book.

"You should insist on my giving you a percentage on the sales when the book is out," said he, rising when the discussion was over.

"Will there be any sales?" she asked impudently.

"How dare you!" cried he, in mock severity. "What is your opinion of my stuff?"

"I don't set up as an authority on economics, but—it is all very dull."

"You didn't think it was going to be a novel, did you?"

"I wish it were!"

"Upon my word! You think it's a waste of time?"

"I wonder!"

He suppressed a laugh. "Say you are sorry!"

"For what?"

"For insulting my work. Not only will it sell, but be the most discussed and criticized book of its year."

"What year?" Her eyes dancing.

"I give it up. Look here, put all that away for a bit, I—I want to talk to you about a matter that is disturbing my peace of mind." Immediately his face was grave, his eyes full of sincere anxiety.

Edwina did as he requested, and, sitting on the corner of the table, waited for him to speak. For a moment he looked as if he was sorry he had ventured so far, but recovering from his momentary indecision, he proceeded awkwardly:

"I am leaving soon—Tuesday morning, and—I thought I would take you into my confidence. It is not many I would care to confide in. But I feel I can trust you. That you are honest and loyal."

"It depends on circumstances and people," she replied, as gravely. "I am not so sure that I would care to assume any responsibility which might require me to be loyal only to yourself."

He looked into her eyes searchingly before he spoke again.

"The fact is, two people are approaching the cross-roads of life, and one of them is—blind. He needs eyes to see with, for the other person is not playing fair. See?"

"In fact, you want a spy and hope that I will be able to fit the post?" Her quick mind flew to the book and she wondered if, after all, it was for the book alone that he had wanted a girl to live beside his wife!

Bainbridge winced at the word "spy", and looked stern. "What do you know about my wife?"

"Nothing at all," she lied. "But one hears things. Also, one knows that we are enjoined to believe the half of what we see, and nothing of what we hear. What I have heard makes me wonder that you do not think yourself greatly to blame."

"Will you kindly make your meaning clear?"

"I have a longing to do so. Your wife is very young and very lovely, and you live in Calcutta, she lives in the hills—alone, but for her child and the *ayah*. It is quite enough to make people invent stories that have no truth whatever in them. Mountains out of mole-hills. Now, if she had chummed with some other woman —older and—a—wiser, that is, a level-headed sort of person, there would have been no gossip at all. Why have you let this happen?"

Bainbridge looked bewildered. Apparently, this aspect of the case had never struck him before.

"That may be," said he, shortly. "It doesn't excuse her in my eyes for behaving foolishly, if not criminally. The worst of it is, I can't know what goes on."

"So you think I should spy on her?"

"No—no! I thought that, being warned, you might be useful in averting needless scandal. Pearle is younger than her years. She has never cared for me. I was a dam' fool to have married her. Serve me right! But I have cared for her since she was a kid. I—I adored her—till she wore me out with her indifference. Now, the fire is burnt out and is in ashes; but honour remains. I am a proud man, Miss Hope, and it would crush me if—if—my honour were dragged in the dust. For such things, men commit murder." He took a turn down the room and returned, his face working. "Mine is a peculiar position. I scarcely hope for you to sympathize, but if you would only—oh, you know!" He made a helpless gesture and ceased speaking.

Edwina did not know what to say. *Hers* was a peculiar position, and one she despised and recoiled from. He had engaged her solely to spy on his wife!—the book was a secondary consideration!

"I think I know—and the best way I can help you both—for, believe me, my sympathies are equally with her!—is for me to do my utmost to protect her. I may or may not succeed. I could only do it in my own way and after my own fashion, but for her own sake I want to protect her from ruining her life—is it that you expect?—women often ruin their lives when their husbands have failed to win their love."

"You cannot say I never tried! But it was fruitless. She began with indifference which grew into intolerance. She hates me."

Edwina shrugged her shoulders. "No use thinking of that now. The thing is to see what one can do, not to let things go from bad to worse. What kind person has been telling you tales?"

"Her own father has friends who have poured advice into his ears and made him think that Pearle is behaving imprudently. He is furious, and wants me to send her home. I, on the other hand, want to know where I am. If she has gone wrong, if things are at their worst, then I'm done. By God! I'll sue for a divorce. As for—the man—he'd better keep out of my way, or I'll shoot him like a dog."

Edwina trembled for the wife—poor, foolish thing! Lovely women, all the world over, were responsible for the tragedies that wrecked and ruined lives.

Bainbridge was also quivering from head to foot, and Edwina understood what a great strain he must have endured that week-end. Things had come to a bad pass—he and his wife were at the cross-roads, and he felt blind and duped.

"I honestly believe that you are exaggerating things," said she comfortingly, though aware that she had no comfort to give him. With the memory of that scene on the hillside, her conscience was heavy. Yet she could not confess what she knew and so make matters worse than they already were! "There is a vast difference between foolishness and sin. Your wife is very good and sweet. She does not impress me as one who could be happy if living in sin and deceit," she added.

"Thank you for that. I shall place my hope and faith in you, and perhaps things will improve."

"I shall do my best, in loyalty to you both, to make them improve."

"I am content," said he, smiling almost affectionately at her, and they separated. Edwina retired to her room with a beating heart, totally distracted from her work and very unsettled in mind.

She tried to find relief by a visit to the nursery for a game with Bizzie, who had come in from his walk, his cheeks as red as a rose; and presently she was joined by Mrs. Bainbridge who was devoted to her boy. She was dressed for a reception at Government House, and Edwina had never seen her look so beautiful. Hers was the exquisite loveliness of a doll, for she lacked vivacity and had no real charm; nevertheless, she attracted men by the sheer perfection of face and form. Could anyone resist her? Edwina wondered, and refused to believe that Basil Bainbridge had told the truth when he described his own feelings as the ashes of a once glowing fire. He behaved as if contemptuous of her looks and mentality; almost as if he hated her for the pain and suffering that had killed love. While regarding her with indifference, he was determined to protect his honour, come what may, and was looking to his secretary for help.

Edwina wanted sorely to ask him the next time he became confidential, why he should not give his wife her freedom so as to find her own happiness with the man she loved. Surely he could easily furnish her with evidence that would enable her to divorce him, even if that evidence were not true. Men did not seem to regard divorce for misconduct as a slur on their honour, having one code of morals for themselves and another for their wives!

Meanwhile, it was pretty to see Mrs. Bainbridge with her son. She held him pressed to her while she loved and caressed him.

"Isn't he a booful boy? Tiss mummy—oh, the precious! How has he been, Ama?"

"Plenty goot," said the woman. "Eating lots, verree happee!"

"I'm so glad! What cheeks!—but touch wood—" reaching out to a piece of furniture with superstitious horror of the Evil Eye. "He's the most wonderful possession in the world."

"A perfect darling!" said Edwina.

"Who could help being crazy about him?" The mother's eyes dwelt in pride on the baby face so near her own, and Edwina enjoyed the picture they made, wishing that the father could come and see this phase of his frivolous little wife.

"Bizzie tiss Wina, too," said the child, stretching out his arms to Edwina, and his mother pushed him towards her. "I'll be jealous of you if he's going to love you so much!" she laughed. "Do you know" (unexpectedly), "I think, were it not for the love we bear our children, we women would do the wildest things under temptation! Don't you think a child has often been the means of saving his mother from leaving her husband and home for another man?"

"I am sure of it," said Edwina. "I have often wondered how women ever leave their own children for a lover. No man is really worth the sacrifice."

"I dare say that is the reason so many women try to have things both ways! One sees so much of it going on. They don't want to lose their kiddies, so they deceive their husbands." She shuddered and rose. "I often think it must be an awful feeling to anyone who is sensitive, that of having fallen—you know what I mean! To know that one is unfit to kiss one's own, innocent child? Yet

—you can fancy how everything goes by the board, so to speak, if one is mad for love!"

"It is a form of madness," said Edwina. "No sane person would sacrifice so much for something so ephemeral as passion, for I suppose it is only passion that sends men and women off their heads for a time! Some commit social suicide, others live in a state of sin. It is really too sordid, and isn't my idea of true love. If I were asked to define true love, I would call it a steady flame which never fails. While passion is just a flash in the pan. Give me the steady flame which neither flares up nor dies."

"You are a queer girl, Wina! But girls are scarcely competent to judge—they have not lived—they cannot understand. Life is very complex and there are temptations you can know nothing of." There was a piteous look in her blue eyes. No more, however, was said, as her husband's voice, calling her to make haste, put an end to the discussion. Mrs. Bainbridge put Bizzie down, kissed him warmly, and ran from the room to her rickshaw waiting outside.

Edwina was so sorry for both husband and wife, for no two persons could have been less suited to each other than they. A union built upon physical attraction on the one side and convenience on the other, was bound to end in disaster. It was merely a question of time. Mrs. Bainbridge had confided to her that her father had been responsible for the match. It was his persuasions that had made her consent, though she had no great feeling for Basil Bainbridge. That indifference had turned into active dislike after marriage when it was discovered that they had nothing in common. She could not enter into his pleasures and ambitions, and he wearied of her childishness.

What had appealed before marriage was a source of irritation afterwards. If he had been impatient of her, she had been inconsiderate towards him. And now that rumour had reached his ears that she had fallen in love with another man and was making herself conspicuous with him, he had come to a realization of the danger of having left her to find her own amusements while he took his apart from her. It was not only women with the instincts of the *demi-mondaine* who fell from virtue and dishonoured their marriage tie.

Edwina blamed Sir Thomas for his daughter's folly. For the sake of money he had made the match, consoling himself with the thought that his daughter needed a wise head like Bainbridge's to guide her steps. He must have considered her brainless and weak—too frivolous and childish to arrange her own life wisely. He had no sympathy for her, and a great admiration for Basil, his partner, so believed that she had done very well, and was rewarded above her deserts with a good husband and a splendid son. What more could she want? And he was now furious with her for creating a scandal by encouraging the attentions of an unscrupulous rascal.

"Father and I never got on," Pearle confided to Edwina. "He looks on me as a fool and a minx, and I get rude in return for his harshness. I am really a very hateful person when he is our guest, so I am glad we are spared a visit from him this year and that Simla has enticed him away. He once had the bad taste to say in Basil's presence that he thought it would be a good thing if Englishmen took a leaf out of the book of Indians when they were constrained to punish their wives for infidelity —slit their mouths, or chop off their noses!"

Pearle Bainbridge departed with her husband to the

reception, leaving Edwina to wonder how he managed to keep up an air of respectful deference to his wife in the face of the world, and if anyone was deceived into thinking him a model of complaisance! It seemed to her that Captain Dysart, at any rate, took no risks, and was clever enough to find something to do during week-ends that would keep him well out of Basil Bainbridge's way. To her mind, he was utterly contemptible.

The following day Mr. Bainbridge left for Calcutta, and a couple of days later Captain Dysart returned from his expedition.

CHAPTER VI

A CALL TO ACT

CAPTAIN DYSART lost no time in calling at the Bainbridges's villa. Edwina learned, on her way out for a walk, that Mrs. Bainbridge had a visitor in the drawing-room at the hour she was usually at the Club. On Edwina's return, in the twilight, he was just taking his leave, and she met him face to face, with Mrs. Bainbridge in the background to make the introduction.

"Miss Hope—Captain Dysart."

Dysart shook hands perfunctorily, till he was arrested by the cool disdain in her eyes, when memory seemed to return on him and he became as awkward as a schoolboy.

"I—don't feel as if you are a stranger," said Edwina awkwardly, for something to say to cover his dumbness. "Mrs. Bainbridge has spoken of you and I have often seen you out."

"I—too—believe we have met—somewhere," said he, full of hesitation, though ready to face the guns.

"It was probably in another world," said she, determined not to have any secret understanding with him. "Haven't you had a feeling that you have lived in another state before?"

"Then we have met—for the first time?" His eyes

held hers a moment, as if to thank her for her decision not to admit the episode on the hillside. "I am happy to make your acquaintance, Miss Hope."

"You are sure to meet again, very often," said Mrs. Bainbridge, "for Miss Hope is to stay with me all summer, working on the book for Basil."

"It is far more agreeable to work in this climate than in Calcutta," he replied, not looking over-pleased to hear the news. "I wish the book luck."

"Wish *me* luck, for mine is the gain. I shan't be lonely any more. Miss Hope dances like a fairy, so she must go to dances with us. You will have to find her a partner."

"There will be no difficulty, I am sure."

"Thank you all the same, but I am in mourning and shall not dance this season," said Edwina.

"I am so sorry," said he, conventionally, and hurried his departure, Edwina inwardly admiring his supple grace and fine physique. He was every inch a soldier, straight, tall, attractive, with pleasing looks and expressive eyes. She was sure that Captain Dysart resented her presence in the bungalow, not knowing whether or not to regard her as a spy of the husband's. She, on the other hand, thought him a downright rascal, who only waited for the husband's back to be turned to make love to his wife. He was doing his best to turn the doll-like creature's head with his attentions and flattery, aware that he was ruining her reputation, yet cruelly bent upon having his way. He knew that a husband was generally the last to be informed of his wife's misbehaviour; the poor fool was generally allowed to exist in his paradise while the world looked on and sneered. But what did he care? Women like Pearle Bainbridge were legitimate prey to such men,

and the worst of it was that his world smiled on the sinner and encouraged his wickedness. Oh, how she loathed men of his type! and how any woman with self-respect and honour could lend herself to such debasement, Edwina could not understand. It was literally a case of being bewitched, for Mrs. Bainbridge, absorbed in her infatuation for Captain Dysart, had no power to judge him, nor did she care what the rest of the world thought of her folly.

Edwina went to her room, full of a growing anxiety to do something that would bring the wife to her senses. Argument would avail nothing. She would have to act—and quickly. But what could she do?

Mrs. Bainbridge told Edwina at luncheon that Captain Dysart was a wonderful hero, with many decorations won in the Great War. In fact, he had been twice mentioned in despatches as fearless, and ever ready to offer himself for perilous situations. "He is rather fascinating, don't you think?" she went on, unable to get away from her subject, her eyes dreamy and love-sick. "If you knew him well, you, too, would find him very irresistible. You should see the way the women here run after him—so bad for his conceit!—but he's not at all conceited and cares nothing for their attentions. You must know that he is very well-connected and might one day come into a title, for his cousin, the heir to Lord Ethrington, is not robust, and Jack—Captain Dysart—is next of kin, after him. Not that I heard this from him, but Mrs. Cavil, whose husband is in the I.C.S., knew him at home. She saw a great deal of him during the War, and she was told so by his friends. He has private means and only stays in the Army because he likes the life and it gives him something to do. Don't you like his appearance?"

"I shouldn't call him exactly handsome," said Edwina, "but I dare say he can be very charming."

Mrs. Bainbridge sighed, looking as if she would love to be able to confide in Edwina, but was still shy of opening her heart to one who was comparatively a stranger. All through luncheon she talked "Captain Dysart" till Edwina was tired of his name. She thought it such a pity that the mischievous fellow had come in the way to make the relations between husband and wife unendurable. The wife, instead of trying to make the best of her life, was learning to hate the man who stood between herself and the Heaven of her desires. Already her folly had earned her husband's contempt, and the two were drifting towards a final parting.

Edwina was sure, too, that men like Captain Dysart were very soon wearied by women who showed themselves enslaved. He had probably played the same game so often, that an easy conquest was not to his taste. Presently, he would break Mrs. Bainbridge's heart, but not before he had taken all she had to give him!

It made Edwina furious. How she hated the heartless, devil-may-care fellow! Her precocious knowledge of life gave her a clearer vision than most girls of her age possessed, and she was intensely moved to save Mrs. Bainbridge from the misery in store. She longed to tell the childish creature that the only way of holding a lover was to keep him at arm's length. It was always the unattainable that drew. Anything else meant a speedy ending of her romance; perhaps, when it was too late for regrets! But would she believe it? or be strong enough to remain aloof?

So far, Edwina believed no great mischief was done.

That conversation they had in the nursery, when it was obvious that the child had stood in the way of headlong disaster to his mother, had been illuminating. But how long would the child be her first consideration?

Though beset by these problems, Edwina worked hard at Basil Bainbridge's manuscripts, compiling a heap of typewritten pages to show him when he came again. Now that she was with his wife, he was able to attend to other matters during week-ends, and became erratic in his visits, arriving without announcing his intention, till his wife never knew when to expect him.

A fortnight later, Billie Hutchins called and suggested a ride. He knew of a pony that would suit her perfectly, as it was trained to the side-saddle, which was Edwina's preference; and if she would only consent and get dressed for riding, he would be back in a moment and call for her.

Edwina was glad, for she thought a ride would be a good tonic for her failing nerve, where Mrs. Bainbridge and Captain Dysart were concerned. They had been out in each other's society a very great deal of late, he attending her to all station functions, despite gossip and slander, started by jealous tongues. Captain Dysart had kept out of Edwina's way, so that she had not had the chance of observing the lovers together, but she knew by Mrs. Bainbridge's restlessness and inability to concentrate even in conversation when they were alone, that something was preying on her mind. It was all very well for Edwina to be living under the Bainbridges roof so as to save people from talking too much, but it did not prevent Pearle Bainbridge from seeing as much as she wished of Captain Dysart all day, if she wished it, at solitary picnics

arranged for themselves at some picturesque spot on a hillside. He was idle and she weak.

Hence Edwina's growing anxiety, and she was glad to banish care as she galloped beside Billie on hill roads, the wind in her face and the riotous glory of a summer sunset spread across the Heavens. Nowhere in the world could the sun set with so much pomp and splendour than among the Himalayas, and she was compelled to draw rein to watch the panorama of crimson clouds melting into gold, and a blue sky change to heliotrope and sea-green on the horizon.

"If you tried to paint it," Edwina remarked, "you would be called a liar. See how richly everything is painted, as it were, in gorgeous shades—hills, trees, house—was there anything half so beautiful?"

"Where is Mrs. Bainbridge bound for to-day?" Billie questioned her irrelevantly.

"I haven't seen her this afternoon. She started out with Captain Dysart while I was still writing."

"Pity her husband doesn't send her home."

"Anything new?" she asked nervously.

He nodded. "Just saw them together."

"Go on."

"They did not notice me, being too much taken up in an argument. As the road was quite deserted, they did not trouble to lower their voices. It seemed that they were almost quarrelling as they rode by. Words were carried to me where I was waiting on the lower road, just my head above the bank—you know the path leading to the livery stables?—and what I heard did not inspire me with confidence in Captain Dysart's intentions. He was giving her a sort of ultimatum—I heard distinctly. I heard him

say: 'If you can't do it, then I'm off, never to return'. She said: 'Oh, Jack! I can't do without you!' He: 'It's up to you.' I then lost what she said, but I could see she looked frightened and tearful, then I could see she had consented, for he put out his hand and took hers with that devilish smile of his, saying: 'To-night, darling. There is nothing whatever to fear. It's the only way; don't forget the signal.' I could hear no more, for they got out of earshot. Now, what do you suppose it can mean?"

"That he is planning something he wants her to do, *to-night*?"

"Precisely. And he has borne down her objections. I am afraid it is very serious. I'd like to kick Dysart, only he's a bigger man than me."

"Oh, Billie!"—Edwina's face crimsoned and she felt panic-stricken. "I don't think, so far, that things could have gone very wrong, but—they are going fast, and something will have to be done."

"Dysart is a reckless devil and is trying to get things both ways, the favour of his friends and an intrigue with Mrs. Bainbridge. He is not the one to want her to run away with him," said Billie, thoughtfully. "I have been puzzling all the way here, and have come to the conclusion that she is to signal to him to-night if she can admit him—when the coast is clear and everything O.K. What else could it mean?"

"It seems a dreadful thing to believe of Mrs. Bainbridge!"

"Why more dreadful than allowing him to act her lover whenever they are alone? If a woman can go to such lengths, she'll sooner or later go farther. It is a question

of degrees, and you can persuade yourself to do anything, if you play with the idea first. Mark my words," he continued earnestly, neither of them in the least embarrassed by the intimate nature of the conversation, "he'll be round at the villa after everyone is in bed, and she'll let him in. Which is her room?"

"The one at the back. It is larger than the others and has a balcony."

"I shouldn't be surprised if he'll be hanging about in the garden ready to be let in by her. The thing is, to find out which door?"

"That should not be difficult."

"Well—shall I come round and spoil his game for him?"

"Don't dream of it!" she exclaimed. "There would be a fight and all would become public. No. Leave the matter to me. I think I can tackle the situation better."

"What do you propose doing?"

Edwina did not quite know, but she was thrilled with excitement at the thought of interfering with Captain Dysart's programme. How he'd hate her henceforth and for ever!—but hardly more than she already hated him!

"Are you sure there can be no other interpretation to the conversation you overheard?"

"Quite sure. It doesn't need a Sherlock Holmes to unravel the mystery. It is as plain as a pike staff. She has let him philander too long and he is getting restive. He knows, if he threatens to cut the whole show and clear out, that he'll bring her to heel. If I understand her sort," said Billie, proud of the faculty of detection he had acquired in the service as Assistant-Superintendent

of Police, "rather than give him up now that he is to her as the sun, moon, and stars, she is ready to give in to any request he might make. Funny, isn't it? to be talking like this to you? It just proves, Wina dear, that you and I are made for each other."

"I'll keep a watch to-night," said she, ignoring his last remark, as she was used to such by now. "Oh, I hope with all my heart that you are wrong."

"I am not specially interested in saving Mrs. Bainbridge, but I should hate to have you in a house where any beastly old scandal is breeding, for it would be unspeakable for you to be obliged to appear in open court as a witness for the prosecution in a divorce suit. To me, it is a nightmare to think that she might be put up by her lawyers to file a cross petition, dragging your name in the mud." His face was a study.

"How ridiculous of you, Billie! Why *my* name?"

"You told me yourself that you take his stuff down to dictation?"

"What has that got to do with it?" indignantly.

"I take it he doesn't dictate to you in the drawing-room with his wife sitting by?"

"Of course not—" Edwina blushed and looked scared, for she recalled the fact that she and Basil Bainbridge usually worked together alone in his study whenever he was up for the week-end. Also, that his wife had often gone out, leaving them alone together, the sole occupants of the house.

"She'd trump up something, if only to be revenged on her husband," Billie added.

"This is a worse world than I had imagined!" exclaimed Edwina.

"I know the full extent of its wickedness," he replied proudly, "and would protect you, even though you won't consider me as a husband."

Edwina parted from Billie in time to change for dinner, and met Mrs. Bainbridge in the drawing-room when the meal was announced.

It was one of the few evenings when her hostess, having no engagement, made it the excuse for an early night. At dinner, she was unusually quiet and disinclined for conversation. Edwina knew she was thinking deeply, with her colour variable, and fingers unsteady. She was up against what was, to her, a difficult proposition, and one which needed to be faced alone and with philosophy. She was not the sort of woman, Edwina knew, to glory in wrong-doing. She would suffer terribly, yet had not the strength to take the only other course possible.

"When do you think you will care to accompany me to the Club?" she asked. "I am often asked why you never go."

"I think I shall wait awhile," said Edwina. "It is such a temptation to dance, and I am not out of mourning."

"Nobody mourns in deep black nowadays. Captain Dysart thinks you quite pretty," she admitted, with an erratic mind. "With your hair, green is your colour, he said. I did not know he had an eye for colour."

"In any case I should not take his opinion on what to wear," remarked Edwina.

"Jack and I had a queer afternoon. Half the time we quarrelled."

"And did you make it up?"

"We always do. I can't bear to fight with Jack. I never

know what he will do. He might take the next train to town!—can you fancy me without him to take me about?"

"There is safety always in numbers, we are told," said Edwina, "and it wouldn't have been a bad idea if you had shown Captain Dysart that you could at any moment be independent of him."

"That shows how little you know of him! He would never come near me again."

"He knows you are so dependent on him that he takes advantage of the fact to threaten you."

"But it's quite true. I'd be miserable if he went away. Where is the use of pretending otherwise?"

"Only that it would do him good."

But Mrs. Bainbridge knew better. "Of course, you have guessed by now," said she, waxing confidential, "that we are mad about each other?"

"I think everyone can see that," said Edwina. "I have been feeling rather unhappy for you, for these things generally end in trouble. We women get the worst of it from the world and life; anyway, why welcome misfortune with both hands?"

Mrs. Bainbridge rose from the table, Edwina with her, to retire to the drawing-room and finish the discussion there. Edwina quoted instances of the sort of trouble her hostess was heading for, but was unable to impress the lady. She had closed her mind to reason, and when not talking was watching the clock and drifting into dreamland. Finally, she said:

"I often think that life is cruelly hard on married people. When it is clear that a couple are not suited to each other, the tie should be dissolved and both be allowed to start

again under no cloud of sin or shame. As things are, a premium is placed on immorality, and there is far more unhappiness in the world than there need be."

"I can just imagine the unholy muddle there would be if things were different. The readjustments would become farcical. It would no longer be the holy estate, but an unholy alliance if people married, knowing the bond was liable to be cancelled for any misunderstanding! How the children would come through the business, God alone knows. Of course, they would have to be brought up without religion, or how would they reconcile their parents' conduct with the teachings of the Bible."

"I don't think it worth argument," said Mrs. Bainbridge. "I am no good at argument, and never know how to talk, but I have heard the thing discussed and it sounded as if it would work all right. As to religion, not being religious myself, I can give no opinion on the subject. All I know is that we have only one life to live, and it is cruel that we should be made to ruin it by an unhappy marriage."

Edwina did not consider that Pearle Bainbridge should have been unhappy in her marriage, for her husband had adored her and would have loved her still, had she tried to love him and be a good wife. But, like a petulant child, she had rebelled against her lot and brought about unhappiness for herself and him by looking elsewhere for love. There was no excuse for her antagonism towards Basil, unless it had arisen out of the knowledge that she was not playing the game.

They smoked for awhile in silence, then Mrs. Bainbridge made an extraordinary request.

"Tell me honestly what you think of me, and I shall not be annoyed if you express a bad opinion."

"I think you very young for your age."

"What is my age?"

"Twenty-five?"

"Right. Go on."

"I think that you will yet look back on this period of your life with feelings of bitter regret. You believe in Captain Dysart, I do not. But I cannot convince you that he is fooling you. He cannot love you truly, or he would not expose you to gossip. That is the first test."

Mrs. Bainbridge flushed and paled. "You have never been in love like this, so cannot judge. When people love madly, it is very little they stop at. Men have committed murder for love."

"There's where you err. If you say 'for passion', I will agree, for passion and love are not the same thing. The one perishes with gratification, the other endures for ever."

"You seem to have a wonderful idea of these things!" said Mrs. Bainbridge crossly. "It surprises me, for what experience have you ever had of life?"

"None, personally. But I have kept my eyes open and seen things happen that have educated me. I am proud of my wisdom. I have learned that the keynote of love is sacrifice; but the goal of passion is self-gratification." Edwina watched Mrs. Bainbridge's face, on which a shadow had fallen, but as the latter had no argument handy, she rose to retire.

"I am tired," she said, with a sigh. "Oh, I wish I were dead! it would simplify matters. The worst of it is that

I can't think clearly. I feel stupid, just as though I had thought too much already, and the reaction had set in. Good night, Wina."

"Do you believe in temporary insanity?" asked Edwina, when she had reached the threshold.

"Of course. People kill themselves when temporarily insane."

"They also do things equally mad when under the influence of passion, which is a form of insanity. Often, when the brain storm abates and the individual is restored to reason, it is too late to undo the mischief done. Therefore, it is something to be thankful for if there is someone at hand to take charge of the situation."

Mrs. Bainbridge puzzled over the remark and shook her head. "I don't quite follow you, but I doubt if anyone is thankful to a person for interfering in her affairs. What exactly do you mean?"

"I only mean that I would give a great deal to see you away from Captain Dysart's evil influence, and if ever I get the chance, I shall interfere to save you if I can."

"You need not worry. I am much more in love with Jack Dysart than he is with me. I believe he is incapable of caring more—that is his nature. But to me he is everything in life, and I don't care if he knows it, for at least he must, in pity, be good to me. He knows that it would just about kill me if he were not. Why I judge that he is incapable of loving as much as I, is that he can find amusement apart from me. He can even let women fawn on him and flatter him. It is a game he rather enjoys which he knows hurts me dreadfully, yet he plays it. He says I come first, but as far as I am concerned

there is nobody else in the world that counts. So don't blame him altogether. I am quite as much to blame for being so completely his to do with as he wills. I did not realize it till—to-day."

"I am very sorry for you," said Edwina heartily.

Mrs. Bainbridge shrugged her shoulders and retired.

CHAPTER VII

THE HAMMOCK

When Mrs. Bainbridge had closed the door, Edwina rose and paced the floor in a frenzy of alarm. It had been with difficulty that she had restrained her nervous excitement throughout that evening, and now, very sure that a crisis was impending, she could scarcely collect her wits to judge how to act. After to-night, should she be the means of saving the young wife from ruining her life, she would be again without work, for it was not likely that her presence would be tolerated in the house. She would never be able to tell Basil Bainbridge the reason for her resignation but must let him think what he chose. She only hoped that whatever she was constrained to do would be everlasting in its result for good.

She had not dreamt that she would be called upon, so soon, to fulfil her promise to Basil to protect his honour. He had gone away, trusting his foolish young wife to his secretary's care because he thought her honest and courageous. Things had gone steadily from bad to worse. He did not know the half of his wife's doings, or imagine that things were so bad. They were now at a dangerous pass, and Edwina was feeling the weight of her responsibility, her nerves jarred with anxiety and anticipation.

Presently, all lights would be out and the villa plunged into darkness. Captain Dysart had asked Mrs. Bainbridge

for a sign, and Edwina argued that he would be somewhere in the vicinity of the villa looking out for it. If men knew men, then Billie was making no mistake by drawing his shameful conclusions.

Mrs. Bainbridge's room overlooked the hillside with a strip of garden between the house and the *khud*. She had a balcony outside her window, covered with a flowering creeper. Beneath it was a door leading to a servants' staircase. This was the only likely quarter on which to focus her attention. Edwina was sure that it would be through that door Captain Dysart intended to enter.

What was the sign Mrs. Bainbridge would give him? She had shown all through the evening that she was on the borderland of surrender. She was like wax in Captain Dysarts hands. Already she was nerving herself to the task of opening that door which the servants would lock the last thing before retiring to their go-downs on the premises.

Edwina retired to her own room to give the servants a chance to lock up for the night, and when all was quiet and dark, she crept forth, glad there was no moon, and made her way round to the strip of garden at the back.

A sharp breeze struck her face round the angle of the house and made her shiver through her cloak. A whisper of leaves stirred about her as the branches of the trees swayed gently under the stars. The sound of rickshaws on the Mall as people hurried home from an entertainment in the station, and the ring of footsteps on the hard road, showed that the hour was not yet midnight.

Edwina sat in a hammock which had been left under the trees beside the *khud*, between which and herself was a low, stone wall covered with moss and ferns, and she waited expectantly. Sooner or later, she believed she

would see something—the sign, presumably a light flashed in the darkness. What else could serve in the darkness?

After awhile she began to fear that it was more likely that the sign would be given at the front of the house, or by now Captain Dysart himself would have been in the narrow strip of garden waiting to enter. How foolish of her not to realize that he would not be in that garden unless she gave the sign!

Noiselessly she made her way, and swiftly, to the corner of the house, for very fear that she was too late, and ran into the arms of a man who at that moment was coming round it.

"Oh!" she gasped involuntarily, smothering a cry.

"*You?*" broke from him angrily. "What are you doing here?"

"I ask *you* that, Captain Dysart. What business have you here at this hour?"

"Girls are not out of their houses in the darkness of the night for nothing," he continued threateningly in a whisper.

"You are quite right," she replied. "I am here to watch for you."

"Then she sent you?" eagerly, a change in his voice. It was easy to see that he was thinking Edwina was Pearle's messenger.

"She has no idea that I am here. Will you come over there?" she suggested. "There is a hammock under the trees, and it would be as well to sit down, I have lots to say to you, Captain Dysart."

"The devil, you have!" Nevertheless he followed her and sat down at her request on a camp chair beside the hammock. "You honour me," he said insolently, speaking under his breath.

"I have no such intention." She could hear him breathing hurriedly as though he had been running, and she was glad to know that he was at least filled with nervous apprehensions. It was not pleasant for him to know that he was in the power of a girl. The fact gave her courage. "Don't make any mistake about it. I am here to put a spoke in your wheel. I am not here for the purpose of helping you and Mrs. Bainbridge to cheat her husband." She, too, spoke in whispers.

"In fact, you are his spy?"

"I am her friend. I happen by the purest accident to have discovered the real state of the case. Mrs. Bainbridge has not told me that you were expected to-night, but someone else did—how it became known is not the question, but you will have to give me your promise to go away and leave Mrs. Bainbridge alone."

"And if I refuse?"

"You will not be surprised if I call the servants, and wire for Mr. Bainbridge in the morning."

"I am not afraid of meeting Mr. Bainbridge. There have been tragedies before over cases of this sort, and if you wish to precipitate another, do your worst."

"Then you refuse?" She rose, and Captain Dysart pulled her back into her seat. "Don't cut short this very interesting discussion, you do not know how much I am enjoying it. Now, tell me, what is your object in butting into Mrs. Bainbridge's affairs?"

"My object is to save her from the evil influence of a bad man."

"That's straight from the shoulder, by Jove!"

"You know she is weak-willed and all heart. You are cruel to have done this to her, for you know that you do

not care enough for her to marry her if she were divorced. Would you marry her?—I want an honest answer."

"I have not given the matter a thought," said he. "But now you mention it—perhaps not. I can't see myself yoked for life to one of poor Pearle's mentality. I should be daft in a week. But she's a dear little thing, and dying to be loved. Why shouldn't it be me as any other fellow?" She could tell by the tone of his voice that he had the audacity to laugh at her.

"If you have any sense of honour, you would see how devilish it all is, and leave her alone. Will you leave her alone, Captain Dysart?"

"At your bidding? Certainly not. It is more likely to crystallize my determination to get on with it."

"Then you leave me no option."

Just then a flashlight illuminated the window of Mrs. Bainbridge's apartment. Three times it was put on and off, then all was darkness again.

"Do you see that?" he asked, under his breath. "A romantic but unoriginal device, I admit. But a signal, nevertheless."

"And one you shall not answer."

"You have certainly made it difficult. If you are so very determined to rouse the servants, it would be prudent for me to withdraw for the present. So it is to be war to the knife?"

"I would rather that you saw the sense of withdrawing altogether."

"You are a queer girl—but you wouldn't be so plucky if you had realized your own danger all the time we have been speaking. What if I had dropped you over the *khud* instead of stopping to argue with you? When the fragments of yourself were picked up a thousand feet below, it would

be said you had destroyed yourself. Lack of motive on the part of persons unknown would have left an open verdict."

It was too dark for her to see the expression of his face, and she was, for the moment, appalled. Could he have stooped to such a criminal act? She tried to hide her shock and behave with fortitude.

"You are a greater devil than I thought you," said she. "I did not imagine that you were, at heart, a murderer! But why waste time in talking? I want you to go."

"And I am just becoming interested in staying to make your acquaintance. You are a damned meddlesome kid, but, by God, you have pluck. I like pluck, and I like *you*."

"I don't want you to like me, for I despise you, Captain Dysart. If you went right away from Rajpahar to-morrow I would begin to think that perhaps you have some good feeling."

"I am afraid I have none," he laughed. "Besides, I am booked to ride in the races during the holidays and cannot leave Rajpahar at the command of a girl. I would have a little difficulty in explaining my defection to Colonel Pegg, whose horse I am training. Anyway, at the risk of being considered a cad, I should stay if for no other reason than to make friends with you. You may not believe it, but this conversation and the cold night dews have cooled my ardour with respect to house-breaking. I will adopt your advice and chuck the whole business. You can take the credit of converting me to a better frame of mind."

"Are you in earnest?" she asked, for his tone was whimsical.

"Honest to God! as my Irish batman says. I'm fed up

to the teeth. I am also beginning to recognize myself as the damned scoundrel you consider me. Therefore, I'll give you my word to quit. Rough on Mrs. Bainbridge, but there can be no half-measures. If I go, I go for good. She's a sensitive little soul, so possibly you'll have some difficulty in persuading her that I am not worth a tear. But I dare say she'll get over it, for she is also as shallow as a duck-pond. I am beginning actually to feel grateful to you, Miss Hope, for what you have accomplished to-night. To-morrow, I shall write to Pearle and tell her that my great respect for her overcame all selfish desire for a greater intimacy, so I saved her from myself. Isn't that the way they do it in shilling shockers?"

"You must be completely heartless," said Edwina. "Heartless and despicable." She was trembling with disgust and anger. "I have no confidence in your resolutions, and none in your word. I could not trust you or believe your word if you swore on the Bible to let Mrs. Bainbridge alone. You will write and tell her exactly why you never fulfilled your part of to-night's programme and, to spare you, she will tell me nothing. But I shall know that she knows, and I shall be aware that you are meeting outside somewhere. Men like you should be shot. You are as poisonous as a dog with rabies. You——"

"Easy," he whispered. "You will be heard up there, and I do not wish Pearle to know you had a hand in this. No one need know. I can't quarrel with you for believing me all sorts of a scoundrel, for, certainly, I deserve that you should." He rose as if to go. "But time will prove to you that, for once, your estimate of a 'bad man' is wrong. There is never a bad man who hasn't a germ in him of goodness. It depends on how it is treated whether it develops or atrophies altogether."

"I can only thank God that Mrs. Bainbridge has been saved to-night from the degradation you planned for her. Go quickly. I cannot bear to speak to you any more."

Captain Dysart sat down again as if thoroughly entertained. "You compel me to linger under the stars with you for the sake of listening to a few more home-truths. You are the first girl I have met who has ever had the frankness to tick me off so fiercely. Let's make a pact. Try not to think so badly of me, and let's be friends. After all, I am giving in—the victory is yours. You can afford to be generous." He held out his hand which she ignored.

"Please go," she cried, impatiently. "We have talked quite long enough."

"I could go on for hours, it is so refreshing to hear the truth spoken so vigorously."

Edwina rose, her lips compressed. "I suppose even a dishonest wife-stealer still wishes to be considered a *gentleman*. If that is so, justify your pretensions to the title, and get out of this before I send for the police."

"That's about the worst you've said yet, and I am forced to obey. But I should like to tell you something, young lady! Since you have crossed swords with me, I take up the challenge."

"What do you mean?" she cried, moving a step backwards, for she had not forgotten nis remark concerning dropping her down the *khud*.

"That I shall owe you one for this. I don't resent your protection of Mrs. Bainbridge, for which I respect you; but I resent your bitter scorn of myself. I am no worse than heaps of fellows who become what Society makes them. You would, possibly, be surprised to know that I am not quite so black as you paint me. I happen to possess some decent instincts not yet killed by the life

have led. Perhaps you will some day and somewhere cknowledge the fact, and take back the vitriolic things ou have hurled at me."

"I shall be only too glad to forget your existence after his," was her reply, while he turned and stepped lightly ut of sight.

Edwina longed to retire to bed, for she was exhausted n body and mind by the experiences of the past hour, ut she dared not take any risks. Captain Dysart was uite capable of returning when the way was clear, so ne looked for the door which Mrs. Bainbridge must have pened for her lover, and locking it, passed through the ouse and out again from the front door, which shut autoatically on the English plan and for which she had latch-key. All day it stood wide open, but at night was closed against chance tramps or thieves.

Once again she occupied the hammock, wrapping herself a rug, for she was determined to make sure that Captain ysart did not return.

With the first grey light of advancing day, she rose, amped and chill, her clothing wet with dew, and let rself into the house, her teeth chattering as she shivered om head to foot.

Her one idea was bed, into which she tumbled and ept like dead till the morning was far advanced. When e awoke the sun was streaming into her room, her in was hot and dry, and she felt light-headed. Thrills d shivers ran through her from head to foot, and she was oroughly ill. When she tried to rise, the room swayed out her like a ship at sea, so that she was forced to lie wn again. She could not think what had made her so —when she recalled, as through a cloud, the fact that e had passed the night out of doors. With an effort,

she reasoned it out. She had done it to save Mrs. Bainbridge from ruining her life for ever, and she had succeeded so far. But would it be of any use to have sacrificed so much, when Captain Dysart, on hearing she was so ill, would feel free to approach Mrs. Bainbridge again?

What was she to do?

Edwina did not know what was the matter with her brain that she was unable to concentrate her mind for long on any subject. She thought, at one moment, of telegraphing to Basil. But then, she would have to explain, and that would be tattling on his wife. It couldn't be done. She wanted to save her, not disgrace her. She could not send for her husband and practically give her in charge!

Perhaps she was not as ill as she imagined. Presently, she would feel better. A bilious attack?—a chill? they passed, and she would be on guard again—but never again in the open all night. She had been foolish to have taken such a risk. Better if she had made some excuse and slept with Mrs. Bainbridge. She could have said she was afraid of thieves, or had a nightmare.

Her throat was parched and dry, her skin hot, and every breath stabbed her in the side.

How helpless she felt when there was so much to do! What she wanted most was to be left alone to sleep and forget care for a time.

Once more she tried to rise and found it still more impossible. Her illness was gaining ground. Mercifully, someone knocked at her door. In a voice she scarcely recognized as her own, she called, "Come in," and Mrs. Bainbridge, dressed in outdoor garments, entered.

"Dear me! What have you done to yourself?" she

asked, shocked to see the change in Edwina's face. "You look so flushed and queer."

"I have taken a chill, I believe."

"Keep close in bed. It is the best place for a chill. You have had no breakfast?—I was wondering why you were having such a late morning."

"I couldn't eat!"

"I'll send you a cup of tea. You won't mind if I go out? The hospital bazaar is this afternoon and I have a stall but I have some urgent work to do this morning—someone to see, so you will understand I can't help it. The *ayah*, however, will look in on you constantly, and if you are at all worse, send for the doctor. I am awfully sorry, dear."

"That's all right," said Edwina huskily. She thought Mrs. Bainbridge was looking pale and queer herself, but she could not trouble to ask questions, as her brain was feeling confused.

"Your skin is hot. I'll send you asperins, and they will put you right in no time. I hate leaving you like this."

"Please don't worry. I'll be all right later."

"I hope so. At any rate, I will return before dark. Bye-bye!" She rustled away in her short silk skirt, promising to send also a thermometer so that Edwina could tell if she had a rising temperature, and so decide about the doctor.

It was clear even to Edwina's confused brain that Mrs. Bainbridge was going in quest of Captain Dysart to learn what had kept him from fulfilling his part of their programme of the night. He might not have written to her—or if he had, she was determined not to give him up.

It was terrible to Edwina to be so helpless and unable to continue her protection of the weak and foolish woman. Something would have to be done to prevent a meeting. At all costs, she must be saved from the shipwreck that threatened her life!

In her excited and feverish condition, Edwina could not think logically, or plan how to act. It was borne in on her that if she could only see and speak to Captain Dysart, she might make a personal appeal to him to behave like a sportsman and a man of honour, if only till she was well and about again.

CHAPTER VIII

HORS DE COMBAT

The *ayah* brought Edwina a cup of tea and exclaimed at the sight of her flushed face and excited manner. "Missee got plenty fever, no?" she cried. "Sending quick for doctor sahib?"

"Not yet, *ayah*. I may be better in the afternoon." The woman departed, shaking her head doubtfully. In her opinion, her mistress should not have left the house when missee was so bad. However, it was none of her business, and she was only to do what she was told.

Edwina tried to read the mercury in the thermometer after she had worked up sufficient energy to take her temperature, and it seemed to her to be soaring in the upper regions of the instrument. She counted the marks till they seemed to melt into each other, and then gave up the task. Time enough when someone took charge of her case. She swallowed the asperin, and after a time felt more able to cross to her writing-table and scribble a few lines to Captain Dysart. She would have to send it by a peon with instructions to find the gentleman, wherever he might be, and deliver the note into his hand.

With the room swinging round her, a pulse hammering in her temples, she managed to make her request:

Please call on receipt of this, as I have something urgent to say and am too ill to know if I shall be able to say it later.

EDWINA HOPE.

Even to her befogged intelligence, she imagined that the Rajpahar Club would be the surest place in which to find him, since he was on leave and free to spend his time as he pleased.

Mrs. Bainbridge would hardly think of that, but make her rickshaw-men climb the hill to his hotel. Her lack of pride and her abject adoration of him had cheapened her in his eyes and made it no difficult matter for him to give her up for some other and more intriguing adventure. To men like Captain Dysart, a woman was no longer desirable if she were too easily won, for the hunter's instinct was strong.

Edwina managed to reach the door and call aloud for a servant.

"Find a coolie," she said to the butler who knew English, "and tell him to give this into the Captain Sahib's hands at the Club. If he is not there, he must be found without fail."

This done, she fell into bed, every ounce of energy exhausted, and lay perfectly still, waiting for her heart to cease its gymnastics. She then tried to sleep.

Sleep, however, was an alarming visitation, her dreams affected by delirious delusions, causing her to suffer from weird hallucinations.

There was no one to whom she could appeal for a drink of water, the *ayah* having taken the child for his morning walk, so that she tossed in fever, her throat parched, her lips dry and scarlet, till Captain Dysart arrived in answer

to her summons, and a servant asked at her door for orders.

By that time Edwina could not collect her thoughts to remember in detail all she had meant to tell him. All she knew was that she had to speak to him—put him on his honour, if he had any. There was nothing else to do. "Send the Sahib in here," she called to the butler who was full of curiosity as to her motive in wishing for an interview with his mistress's special property. The manners and ways of the English ladies were past his understanding.

"Miss Hope?" Captain Dysart's voice sounded from far away though he seemed to tower above her. "You are very ill. You should have a doctor. Where is Mrs. Rainbridge?"

"I *had* to send for you," cried Edwina, peering at him through glistening eyes and ignoring his question, "because I was so afraid—you—would not play fair now I'm sick."

"You *would* doubt me! What's made you ill?" he asked, bending down to her.

"Ill? oh, that was from last night—it was so cold and damp out there all night——"

"What?—all night? You stayed out there *all night* because of me? Good God!" He was robbed of further speech in his shocked self-reproach.

"You see," she confided in him, half-deliriously, "I was so afraid he would come back!"

"Who, in God's name?"

"That dreadful man—Captain—Captain . . ." she passed a hand across her eyes. "I feel all muddled. *You* are Captain Dysart?" with sudden concentration.

Confused and panting, she waited for strength to continue, looking pathetic in her helplessness and almost

beautiful with the crimson of the fever in her cheeks and the scarlet of her mouth.

"I did not come back, for I had given you my word I was through with it all. I wrote and told her so this morning, making it clear that I had thought things over—can you follow me?"

He saw that she could not, and fetched a glass of water from a jug on the washstand, and held it to her lips.

Edwina drank thirstily and thanked him, hardly conscious whom she was thanking.

"I am going to call up the doctor," said he. "Where is Mrs. Bainbridge?" he again asked testily. But as Edwina was past replying, he left the room to make straight for the telephone.

When he returned to the bedside, Edwina was delirious and took him for the doctor. Her anxiety to get well quickly was pathetic, and Captain Dysart had to listen to her reasons, muttered to herself while she thought aloud, looking into space with beautiful, glittering eyes.

"I can't lie here and leave her to her fate. She is so childish and short-sighted. It is all the present, and the world well lost for love. How can I tell her that it is not love but something evil that tries to pass itself off for love. She won't believe it, so I must get up presently to save her from his wicked influence. He would drag her down to the gutter. He has no pity!—he is all self—a cruel nature. The nature of a beast of prey. He does not understand that love is too beautiful a thing to lend itself to vice and degradation. His one idea is to destroy. He is the devil incarnate. Oh, how I hate him!"

"Look here, kid," said he, in a voice hardly under control. "Just get it out of your head that he is ever going to

repeat last night's stunt. Won't you believe in him and trust his word."

"Trust his word?" she repeated slowly, knitting her brows. "If he is without honour, how can one trust his word?"

"Listen," said he, in agitation. "He swears before God that you may rest happy. He has done with that affair—from last night and for ever. Understand? Don't worry any more."

"Don't worry!—oh, how I have worried! Then is it all right?"

"Absolutely. It's finished. Now go to sleep."

Captain Dysart received the doctor when he arrived, and established himself in the house for the morning as Edwina's nurse, with the help of the *ayah*, till Mrs. Bainbridge was traced to the bazaar, and fetched home.

She had endured unspeakable suspense and unhappiness all day, as she had failed to locate Captain Dysart, and then to find him at the villa superintending the care of Edwina, whom he scarcely knew, was puzzling to a degree. How strange he was! What did it mean, after his letter that morning which had upset her so? A sudden fit of conscience? She did not find fault with his chivalry, but why should they cease to be lovers, innocently? She could not imagine existence if deprived of his love and devotion. He had made himself necessary to her, and it was like death to feel that he was determined to cease everything. Women were happy if sure of a man's love, and given the innocent expression of it. Men were not content with half-measures. It was all or nothing, with them!

"Miss Hope is very ill," Captain Dysart said, preparing to leave immediately now that she had come. "The

doctor says it is pleurisy and by to-morrow it is more than likely to be pneumonia. The temperatures run very high, which hints of mischief in the lung. I have kept a chart for the nurses who are expected by nightfall. She is in need of unremitting care, her life is at stake."

"I had no idea she was so bad when I left, this morning," cried Pearle Bainbridge, alarmed. "You surely don't think I went away knowing she was very ill? I thought it was only a bit of a chill. . . ."

"I don't think you would be wilfully negligent of anyone staying with you." The irony of it was—and he knew it—that Edwina Hope was likely to be at death's door, presently, through her effort to protect Pearle Bainbridge from what, to her, was worse than death! "Take great care of her, Pearle. She's worth it—a loyal friend to you."

"Oh, I know that! She is the dearest thing ever!—but, Jack, why did you write like that this morning? You frightened me so! I thought I was never going to see you again!"

"You'll see quite a lot of me, I am afraid, but all I said is true. I've thought about it and have decided to cut it out. It's—oh, well!—a damned rotten game. I have no wish to be your enemy, my dear. I was very nearly that—last night."

"Then what made you change all of a sudden?" She lifted large limpid eyes to his, full of pathetic reproach. The tears were not far off, for he was so different—so changed.

"I—don't know—conviction, I suppose. I am sorry if it is going to hurt, Pearle. It was beastly of me, but I'm glad no harm's done, old thing. I should have wanted

to quit—drop over a cliff—if I had had my way and things were past praying for! We can still be friends, Pearle."

But Pearle was childish enough to refuse the consolation he offered. She was cut to the heart and agonized with shame. That it should have come from him! that she should be so humiliated!

"Oh, it is terrible! You have stabbed me. I have been fooled—fooled! Oh, my God!" She was bordering on hysteria, so Captain Dysart showed the white feather by retiring incontinently from the scene. She was at liberty to think ill of him, to hate him, if she pleased, and the sooner the better. He fled at a gallop from the house to the Club where he sought diversion among his friends, assisted by innumerable whiskies. It was damnable, thought he, to have landed himself in such a mess, and not to be able to rid himself of the self-reproach gnawing at his vitals for his culpability in the matter of Edwina Hope's dangerous illness.

If she died, her death would lie at his door, that was positive. Nothing would rid him of the feeling that his beastly conduct had done it—robbed the world of a splendid, plucky kid, straight as a die and as pure as one of God's own saints. Pity there were not a few more like her knocking around, then fellows would have some incentive towards decency.

When Mrs. Bainbridge came out of her hysteria, she was sorry she had not exercised more self-control. What she wanted to tell Jack Dysart was that she, being the chief person to be considered, had no use for his self-sacrifice. She loved him and would go with him to the world's end, if he wished it. Why should they shatter their love-dream so completely, when all of life was before

them?—both quite young—and loving each other passionately? She did not care for an intrigue any more than he. It was the underhandedness of it that went against the grain for them both. But if she did not mind giving up her beloved baby (here, the pang at her heart was acute) and did not care two hoots for the scandal of a divorce suit, why should he mind? Men never suffered like women! It was too late in the day to turn back. All Rajpahar would notice that something had happened, and humiliate her by supposing that he had wearied and had dropped her in the way that he had dropped other women who had bored him. She would almost have preferred that they should gossip and scandalize her than regard her as a failure!

She sat long, considering her position and forgetting her duty to the patient under her care. She had no heart for nursing when her whole world had gone black. If the worst came to the worst, she would drop a hint to one of her friends of a quarrel to account for the estrangement; she being the one to cancel the friendship!

But it was too hard for her to bear. She could not face it! Rajpahar without Jack beside her, Jack to make love to her, oh, what was she to do? She was filled with panic for the empty days and forlorn outlook. If she attempted to carry off her humiliation by flirting with others, anyone would see through the thin pretence in a moment, for she cared too much! She cared, too, terribly much!

It dawned on her to wonder why Jack Dysart had called at the house. Had he come following his letter to make it appear less unkind?

That was it. He felt sorry for her. At least, he was sorry for her! That being the case, it might yet be possible to get him back!

Instantly cheered by this new aspect of the case, she made her way to the sick room to see what she could do for dear Edwina. Poor girl! And to think that Jack Dysart had actually looked after her all day!

She was jealous to think that it was Edwina and not herself who was so ill with Jack to nurse her.

Edwina looked so ill that Mrs. Bainbridge was alarmed and sent a telegram to her husband. He engaged the girl, and it was his duty to share the responsibility of her illness. If it was going to be pneumonia, as every symptom indicated, then she might die, and it was necessary for Basil to be on the spot, as nothing terrified Pearle Bainbridge so much as having to stand by while someone she knew intimately was dying.

After the telegram had been despatched, she fluttered about the house aimlessly, and sighed with relief when the day nurse arrived. At last, she need not be depended upon for anything. She was too ignorant of illnesses to attempt to nurse. Some women had the faculty—others were hopeless, losing their heads when most required to be collected and calm. She was too inexperienced, so was thankful to stand aside and earnestly hope for the best.

CHAPTER IX

BULLETINS

SELF-DECEPTION is sometimes useful in helping a weak character over a difficult period. It was surprising what a lot of comfort Mrs. Bainbridge derived from the thought that Captain Dysart was acting thus purely out of consideration for her. She could even afford to admire him for his determination and good feeling, arguing that it proved what a splendid fellow he was. If it was scant comfort, she hugged it to her heart, and tried hard to excuse all that followed which should have been inexcusable. Some day he would tire of self-denial, and return to her, saying, "Sweetheart, I want you so—come with me and let us be happy in some other country where no one will know us, and be all in all to each other." If it sounded rather banal, it was on the lines of the stuff she had read in novels which portrayed life with undoubted realism, and she was well satisfied to believe that it might yet be true of her own case.

When Captain Dysart called daily for news of Edwina, she smiled to herself, believing that the moth took any excuse for returning to the candle. He tried, poor dear, to appear natural and friendly, avoiding her eye when he put his question, but she was not to be deceived.

There were times, however, when she met him in the

company of her friends, apparently his gay self, and her heart was lacerated and rebellious. He had no right to make her suffer so, if by a look he could restore her to happiness. But he never looked except at others. He was always careful to avoid meeting her eye. So she talked and laughed with her head in the air, wondering what people were saying of them now.

In secret, she wept herself blind, wishing she were dead.

"There should be a crisis shortly," said Dysart, one day to Mrs. Bainbridge, refusing to enter the house on the pretext that he was on his way to fulfil an engagement. Since the case had resolved itself into double pneumonia and pleurisy, he was unfailing in his early-morning call. "There is always a crisis, and if she is holding her own, she might pull through all right. What is the doctor's idea?"

"He says it's very serious, but he is quite hopeful. Edwina has a sound constitution and heaps of reserve strength, which is all to the good," said Mrs. Bainbridge coldly. It annoyed her that he should be so solicitous, even more so than Edwina's Billie who was regular enough, but optimistic to a high degree. Billie's faith in Edwina's pluck was his sheet anchor. "I am sure it is very kind of you to trouble so much for a mere acquaintance. She'll be flattered when she hears."

"Don't fail to tell her. But you can rest assured that it will mean nothing to her. She looks on me as beneath contempt."

"It's funny you should have found that out! I have known it all along. She has no opinion of you at all and often made me see it."

"I don't blame her. She's a nice kid."

It was said with a strange softening of voice and expression, and Pearle Bainbridge was startled. Was he actually taking an interest in Edwina for her own self? She and Edwina were the antipodes of each other in looks and disposition, and she could not imagine anyone, who had loved her, admiring Edwina, who was boyish and amazingly independent.

"I never knew you admired Edwina Hope," said she, jealously.

"I did not know it myself. I suppose it is because she has no use for me. It is always the way, isn't it?" he remarked, hardly aware of his cruelty.

"Your vanity has received a blow. A good thing, too," she cried, her heart bursting.

"That's it. We men are supreme egotists and don't relish having to acknowledge that we are sometimes contemptible."

"How have you been contemptible, Jack?" she asked, piteously.

Jack Dysart, who was taking his departure, turned and looked full into her appealing blue eyes, his own full of impatience.

"If you don't know, there is little use in my staying to discuss it, for it can only lead to distress," he said resolutely. "I have behaved like a rotter—there's no denying it. I'm fed up with everything, myself most of all. I'm sorry"—seeing the pain in her face—"damned sorry."

Mrs. Bainbridge moaned, covering her face with her hands.

"Look here," said he, bending towards her. "It's going to be my business to open your eyes to just what sort of scoundrel I am. I am not worth an extra beat of your heart—that's true. You have glorified me in your mind into a sort of god, while the fact is, I am more of a devil. I would have taken all you could have given me, and then gone—not caring a cent what became of you, because men who carry on as I have done are rotten to the core. They don't love the women they ruin. Got that? If they knew the true meaning of love, they wouldn't ruin them—take that from me. Deep in a fellow's heart is always the ideal of the woman he will one day love if she can be found. The trouble is that he often goes to his grave not finding her, so he plays at love and plucks at the best to fling it away. That's me. I have done that sort of thing for years, and am callous about it—at least, I *was*—till a short time ago, when I came to my senses and saw myself as I am. Since then, I have hardly been able to live with Jack Dysart—he is such a black-hearted outsider! The best thing that can happen is for him to make up his mind about it and quit. There isn't much in life to live for, is there? But this I will say, and that is, thank God on your knees that I did not turn up that night. Good-bye."

Mrs. Bainbridge could not attend to anything for the rest of the day. At last she understood, and the dreariness of understanding was deadly.

Basil arrived that afternoon, and his wife, unable to bear his society after all she had been through, went to bed with nervous prostration. Those who did not know the real cause were ready to sympathize with so natural a consequence of the nervous strain imposed on her by Miss Hope's illness.

Edwina herself knew nothing, but lived in a nightmare of stabbing pains and breathlessness, wild dreams and burning temperatures. She lost all count of time, and, whenever conscious, was too much of a sufferer to think of anything but her own torture. Faces came and went, among them Basil Bainbridge's. Once she tried to tell him how desperately sorry she was to be such a trouble and expense. She was sure she would never work for him again, as she was going to die.

His reply made no impression on her brain as her mind wandered to things he could not understand, such as flashlight signals and someone flinging her down the *khud*. Evidently, in her wandering fancies, she believed that her sufferings and illness were consequent on that act of brutality.

"He said he would, and that it would be thought I had walked in my sleep. He was cruel and bad—at heart a murderer."

"Who, Wina?" Basil asked her tenderly.

But Edwina had lost the thread of her complaint and was muttering that the stars were wonderfully bright and the Milky Way never so clear. It had felt so cold—damp and chilly. The dew was heavy and she had been wet through, yet—how hot it had become! There was a fire consuming her. All the while she was speaking, she seemed to be seeing visions with half-closed eyes glittering with fever.

"What is she talking about?" he asked the nurse.

"She goes on in this way, imagining things. You can't pay any attention to delirious dreams. She is too weak, so we don't encourage her to talk."

Basil Bainbridge was very pitiful towards her, and his

manner gentle and protective. A manner that altered the moment he crossed the passage to visit his wife. She lay in bed, her face to the wall, hysterical if anyone spoke to her. The sight of her husband only made her worse, so it was seldom he ventured to enter her room. When he did, he could find nothing to talk about and she gave him no encouragement. It seemed that they were less and less in sympathy as time passed, and he brooded a great deal, unable to understand the meaning of it all. He was suspicious of her and afraid that Edwina's illness had little to do with her state, for he could see that things were no longer on the same footing between herself and Jack Dysart.

Dysart called every day to ask about Edwina but never saw Mrs. Bainbridge nor sent her messages through her husband, which would have been a very natural thing to do, considering they had been so friendly as to make tongues wag.

Every evening he met Captain Dysart at the Club and discussed with him Miss Hope's chances of recovery; and still the young man seemed quite indifferent to the fact of Mrs. Bainbridge's breakdown. The only sign he made when others were discussing the misfortune was to turn his back and lounge out of the room.

Bainbridge's eyes hardened and his mouth shut close as though to stifle words he would have liked to have said, such as—"Damn him! If he has been trifling with her heart, I'd like to kill him!" (which was strange, since he had lost all love for his wife).

Billie haunted the house for news of Edwina, and once his eyes were full of unshed tears, on hearing of her sufferings.

"You are quite an old friend, I believe?" Bainbridge remarked.

"I have known her only since she came out from home, but—she is the only girl I want to marry. Unfortunately, she has no use for me but as a pal."

Bainbridge was conscious of a sense of relief, for he had no wish to lose his secretary—besides, he was growing fond of her and was nothing if not a dog-in-the-manger with regard to her. Respect and admiration had bred affection which, in his present state of matrimonial disillusionment, was dangerously ready to become desire.

"She's a good girl and I think very highly of her."

"She is one of the very best," said Billie, too choked with emotion to discuss Edwina with any man.

Mrs. Bainbridge left her bed looking white and pathetic the day Edwina passed her crisis and was pronounced out of danger, though still too weak and ill to do anything but sleep and be fed. Basil saw her retire when Captain Dysart called at the usual hour, and was confirmed in his suspicion that there had been a quarrel not of her making. However, he was glad to see the end of the intimacy, the extent of which he had not been able to gauge, and decided to treat the affair naturally. Any other course would only have stimulated scandal. He offered the visitor a drink and mentally acknowledged that not many women were likely to resist his type of manhood, curse the fellow! for he was also gifted with a charm of personality that Bainbridge himself found attractive.

When he had gone, Bainbridge found his wife engaged with needlework in the drawing-room, and took a seat not

far from her, fully aware of the change in her looks. It was as if someone had breathed on a mirror and the glass was dimmed.

"I have been wondering if you would like to go home?" he remarked casually. "Your people would be delighted. It is a year and a half since you saw your mother."

"What?—now?" she asked coldly. "No thank you. I have no wish to be caught by the monsoons while on the high seas. Are you very anxious that I should go?"

"I am speaking out of consideration for you. However, if you would rather not, enough said."

"The only consideration I want from you is to be left alone. My nerves won't stand your suspicious looks and your obvious distrust."

"Can you truthfully say that I have had no reason to be suspicious and distrustful of you?" he asked her harshly.

"If you have, it doesn't improve things for us, does it?"

"I want a straight answer to a straight question. How far have things gone between you and Dysart?"

"Rather late in the day to ask that question," said she, shrugging her shoulders. "But if you wish to know, I have no desire to keep you in the dark. I have been, and am still, very much in love with Captain Dysart, and if he asked me, I would leave you to-morrow and go to him. But it happens that he prefers to spare me from 'ultimate regrets and social ostracism'—his own words, quoted from his last letter—so now you know."

"You're a damned fool, Pearle," said her husband, shamed and insulted. "Women like you make trouble for yourselves. You ask for unhappiness. Not content with your home, husband, and child, you search for something better, and end by pulling down your house about your ears. Take it from me that there isn't a man living who is worthy of the sacrifice you would make in order to become his mistress. Listen, you priceless idiot!"—he was furious with her for her weakness and folly, "this very man you are ready to leave husband and child for were he to raise a finger, has ruined many women who were fools like you, and where are they now? There are heaps of fellows could tell you where to look for them. Men who make love to other men's wives do so because they find it far more exciting than running after unmarried girls to whom they might have to propose. It is generally the unattainable that keeps them dangling in hopes of winning a triumph some day; but once they get what they want, the game is over. Where, then, would you be? What sort of a life could you hope to live? Just get by yourself and think it out, and I'll wager you won't be so ready to despise the steady flame of a husband's devotion on which you can bank for ever. I am fed up with all this silly sentiment that blinds women like you to the solid facts of existence. God! —I regret with all my heart the day I made you my wife."

"The regret is mutual," returned Pearle scornfully. "You blame me for turning to another man instead of my husband for love? Blame yourself for your lack of understanding. You husbands who marry girls much younger than yourselves are too practical, too unromantic to give them happiness. You leave too much to be taken

for granted. You don't know how to *make* love! Thoroughly pleased with yourselves, you imagine in your egotism that you are just IT, as husbands—faithful and true!—for which a wife should thank the Almighty on her knees! Good husbands are so scarce! You don't ever think that a girl wants a great deal more than the knowledge that her husband cares for her and is faithful to his vows. She wants to be told so frequently. She wants to feel and experience love in all its expressions, and when starved for the romance that is her right, is it any wonder that she turns to someone else who is an artist in such things? How are girls with little or no experience of life to know if a lover is sincere or false? It is his demonstrations of love that move and appeal! Oh, you smug creatures who marry after a hectic career as bachelors, and take to yourselves wives from the schoolroom, as it were, and expect to settle down to tranquil domestic joys! Did it never occur to you that your wife would also like a little of the exciting experiences you have known? It pleases you to enlighten her ignorance on the subject of passion, but when her nature awakens to an understanding of life, you have nothing to give her but the monotony of connubial relations almost devoid of love-making! You wonder why I never could love you? Perhaps this is the answer. It would have been good for you if you had learned how to *make* love to your wife. I've had enough of this conversation," she concluded wearily, "so please, in future, let me alone. You and I have to appear on good terms with each other in public, so spare me from too much of your society when we are at home. I am tempted to regret that I have not given you cause to divorce me; for then, at least, I would be freed from you."

Basil Bainbridge was dumbfounded. He had never thought that Pearle had it in her to think or feel so deeply; nor had he credited her with the eloquence to express her thoughts. She had, indeed, awakened to an understanding of life!

CHAPTER X

A FORCIBLE ARGUMENT

As Edwina gradually recovered, the memory of the night which had caused her illness returned in all its distress, and she wondered what had happened while she had lain unconscious and unable to stand guard over Mrs. Bainbridge. She did not recall having sent for Captain Dysart. She could only think of him as the worst type of man she had met in her life, and wish with all her heart that Mrs. Bainbridge's eyes would be opened to his perfidy, so that she should no longer be under his influence.

It was to be seen if Captain Dysart had been faithful to his word.

Very wistfully she followed Mrs. Bainbridge with her eyes, as she moved about her room talking to the nurse and interesting herself in the patient's recovery. What was she hiding behind her strange pallor and pinched beauty? Why did she look tired and depressed? She had lost all the bright vitality which had given her doll-like face life.

Mr. Bainbridge rarely visited Edwina while his wife was in the room, but when she had left he would lounge in and sink heavily into a chair by the couch on which she reclined in the window, and brood silently.

"What did you mean by giving us such a fright?" he

once asked her, when she was strong enough to converse for awhile.

"I am so sorry for the worry I have been to you and Mrs. Bainbridge."

"That's nothing! It is great to see you picking up steadily. You should have heard the stuff you ranted in your delirium."

"Did I talk?" she asked, alarmed.

"Didn't you! You were evidently having a bad time with some black-hearted villain who was always blamed for pitching you down the *khud*."

Edwina looked troubled. "What else did I say?"

"I can't remember. No one pays attention to fevered fancies. Delirious people are not accountable for the things they say—for instance, you talked of lying out under the stars all night!"

"I had no idea I talked so wildly! I must have been dreaming all kinds of horrors."

"You were. Who was it you were so keen on turning out—'Don't dare to come back. Go, and never let me see your face again!'" Basil laughed. "I felt quite sorry for the poor devil."

"It must have been the devil in reality," she replied, a faint colour tingeing her cheeks. "What about your work?" changing the subject. "I feel so guilty for having left it untouched so long."

"It can wait. I am feeling rather off writing just now, and couldn't concentrate if I tried ever so hard. You seem to have quite a platoon of youngsters attached to yourself, young woman. They have come every day, and all hours of the day, to ask for you."

"Billie and Co.," she returned with her old smile. "Dear things, all of them!"

"Billie, I presume, is Will Hutchins. Nice lad. He's broken-hearted because you have no use for him."

"Did he tell you so?"

"Quite frankly. Shows what a little human sympathy can do. You are a plucky kid, and some fellow is going to be very lucky some day." He covered her hand with his own just as he heard his wife entering the room and, to Edwina's embarrassment, did not remove it all the while she remained talking to the nurse. She was surprised to find her husband with Edwina, and apologized unnecessarily for intruding.

"You have kept all Miss Hope's letters, haven't you?" she asked the nurse. "I think she might have them, don't you?"

"I think so, if she promises not to tire herself writing replies," said the nurse.

"We shan't give her writing materials as yet, so that's all right." She gave Edwina a brilliant smile, and ignored her husband and the fact that his hand caressed Edwina's.

"Poor kid! How cruel we are to you," said Basil.

"Oh, no. Too kind. I can never be grateful enough." Edwina endeavoured to recover her hand, but found it of no use.

"Quite a bunch of letters has collected for you," said Pearle Bainbridge, smilingly. "You sly thing! I never knew you had so many admirers. Your police boy has been nearly off his head, though he would always claim that you would recover; the wish, of course, being father to the thought! And who else do you think hasn't missed a day, calling every morning, like clockwork, to ask for the latest bulletin?—you would never

guess. Someone you have always treated with the utmost contempt," as Edwina looked puzzled. "Captain Dysart. Do you know, we are still quarrelling? You remember the night before you were ill I said we were rather at loggerheads, for I could not agree to something he had suggested?—well, it's gone from bad to worse since, and now we scarcely ever speak."

The colour rose into Edwina's white cheeks, following a leap of her heart. It was good hearing for her, though to Basil, the husband, it sounded somewhat mysterious.

"I shouldn't worry," said Edwina. "At best, he was a false friend. I never believed in his sincerity."

"We live and learn," said Pearle, bitterly. "Here are the letters—" taking them from the nurse's hand. "Among them one from *him*." Her eyes followed the letter wistfully as it passed into Edwina's keeping with the others, showing plainly her anxiety to know its contents.

Edwina laid the packet down, saying she was in no hurry to open her letters.

Seeing her indifference, Mrs. Bainbridge retired, and her husband sat back in his chair, looking unutterably bored.

"Don't let me interfere with your reading of the charmer's letter," said he, obviously annoyed, his eyes scowling at the open window.

"I won't read it. I despise him too much to read anything he has written," said she.

"What?—but aren't you curious to know what he says?"

"Not at all. It is quite immaterial to me what he has said."

"Does he know how you regard him?"

"I have left him no illusions on that point."

"But"—in proportion to her indifference grew his interest. "Surely the fellow is entitled to be read! Say what you will, if he is congratulating you on your recovery, he is being courteous, and you need only be civil."

Edwina, however, was opening another letter, and was impatient of the argument.

"You can throw it in the fire, if you like," said she. "Or if it will interest you to see how he expresses his unwanted congratulations, read it aloud to me."

Bainbridge could not deny that he was curious to know how Jack Dysart expressed himself to Edwina while flirting with her hostess, so he readily took advantage of her permission to open and read the letter—first to himself in order to be familiar with the unfamiliar handwriting, and then to her. But in a moment, Edwina was deep in a screed from Billie and had forgotten Captain Dysart and the supposed letter of congratulations.

> You wonderful kid (it ran), thank God you are recovering! I begin to breathe again! Do you know that I have not been able to forget you since that regrettable incident in the starlight when you flayed me with your contempt? I have been wretched to think that I was the cause of your dangerous illness, and, if you had died, I should never have been able to forgive myself. But I have tried to make amends. Not for nothing did you brave the night dews outside my lady's window that night, for your courage

and determination, to say nothing of all you said to me, have sunk deep—gone home—and made me see myself as I am—a cad—a contemptible cur, unfit to associate with decent women. Henceforth, Pearle Bainbridge is safe from me. I write to tell you that I have kept my word to you. Perhaps, if you had credited me with some remnants of honour, you would never have been at death's door. But because you were so sure I was incapable of keeping my word, you mounted guard all through the cold and night dews, till morning! You have given me a fine example of fidelity to an ideal. It will be the reproach of my life, for you might so easily have died.

Perhaps you won't believe me if I tell you that my heart is no longer in the affair—if ever it was! There was a time, if you will believe me, when I was not the rotter I have become. I don't know why I should be so anxious to convince one little girl of this fact, but I want to, more than anything I know. You have condemned me, and until you reprieve me I shall not feel at peace with life again.

What I want now, above all things, is a line to say that you will give me a chance to be your friend. I ask for nothing more than friendship, and the assurance that you will allow me to prove to you that there is some virtue deep down in the mire of my unworthiness which can be dug up and brought to the surface to triumph in the end. Write soon to cheer my depression. I have been in the depths ever since you fell ill, and I feel like a ship at sea which has lost its helm.

Forgive this lengthy petition and believe that it is sincere; though, if you refuse to do so, I cannot blame you.

Yours, in the deepest gratitude,
JACK DYSART.

Bainbridge looked up at the sweet, pale face absorbed in Billie Hutchins's letter and, after a moment's hesitation, stuffed Dysart's into his coat pocket. To his mind, the gunner was at his old game—the confidence trick. He was mad at his failure to prove irresistible to Edwina—since he had always believed himself infallible with women—and was not going to rest till he had her also his abject slave.

At all costs, he should not have his colossal vanity gratified.

Bainbridge was fiercely determined that Jack Dysart should for once discover that he had made a mistake! He had done too much mischief to be encouraged to do more, and Edwina was far too good to be fooled through the by-ways of pity. She had forgotten that she had given him permission to read the letter to her, and would only feel relief if told he wished to spare her, so he made a casual excuse:

"A waste of time to read it. You were right not to bother. I'll destroy it, if you like?"

"Please do," she said, absently, and he retired from the room, full of the discovery he had made through this letter of what had been about to happen to his wife when Edwina pluckily interfered. Metaphorically, he took his hat off to her. She was, indeed, wonderful to have dared so much and risked her death by chill to save another woman from disaster. He read and re-read

Dysart's letter, boiling with rage to think of the man's devilishness, and his gratitude to Edwina was limitless. He knew that, if it had rested with her, he would never have heard the story of her great adventure and self-sacrifice. No one would ever have known the truth, except through Dysart. He thought of Pearle, his wife, and was too angry to feel that he could ever forgive her. She had evidently been ready to receive her lover—lost to all sense of honour and a married woman's obligations. A wife and mother!—and she had been prepared to give herself to another man!

How had the truth been discovered by Edwina in time for her to interfere? This he might never know, but the fact remained that she had acted with bold initiative, and Pearle had been saved. Thank God for that. His wife had been saved. . . .

But did she know who had saved her? Did she quite realize the nature of the man who would have betrayed her?

If she did not know, it was time she did. She must share his mortification and humiliation.

For a while he almost believed that it would have given him the utmost satisfaction to beat her as he would a wilful and wicked child, caught in the act of injuring herself and all belonging to her. He had no longer any desire for her love, and vengeance was very appealing. Romantic little fool!—and yet—he had loved her very much in his quiet, undemonstrative way. . . .

She had blamed him for that very undemonstrativeness. She had accused him of smugness. . . .

Bainbridge wondered a little about it. If he had not been so secure in his idea that the bond of marriage alone was enough to ensure contentment and happiness, he

would probably have taken some trouble to act the lover to his childish and frivolous wife. In any case, he was not inclined to excuse her, for she was a mother, and thoughts of her son should have kept her straight. Yet, she was no vampire, but merely a romantic fool like many another woman whose perspective of life is fogged by her own sentimental outlook. A time would assuredly come when she would look back and rue her folly in flinging away the love of a devoted husband for an ephemeral love affair that could have brought her nothing but sorrow and remorse.

Presently, he rose and went in search of his wife, the letter open in his hand. He found her restless and idle, unable to pin her attention to anything for long, and bordering on a fit of hysteria. She had seen the envelope of Jack Dysart's letter to Edwina, and all the humiliation and pain of jealousy had returned to torture her.

"I am not mistaken, am I, in thinking you never knew the cause of Edwina's illness?" he asked, standing before her full of stern condemnation.

"I don't understand. How could anyone know?" Her blue eyes were widely innocent.

Bainbridge believed her and continued, tapping the letter in his hand.

"Here is the letter you saw a while ago, from Dysart to Edwina. After you have read it, I shall destroy it, as Edwina would have returned it unread. She does not know the contents, and need never know them; but I want you to see what he has written in order to realize who it was who has saved you from going headlong to perdition."

He handed her the note and watched her changing expression—the dark flush that rose when she read Jack

Dysart's own doubt as to whether he had ever really loved her. Pity gradually took the place of anger and contempt as he saw her suffering, her look of a beaten child.

"Oh, my God! he could write to her like that!" She sank into a chair, broken-spirited and despairing. He almost wished she would cry like the baby she was, but she only shivered and trembled.

"Don't blame the girl for that letter. She has no tolerance for him! She despises him utterly."

"Why did she give you the letter to read?"

"I asked to read it and, not knowing its nature, she did not care. She believes it has been destroyed—so much for Dysart!"

"How could he! Oh, how could he!" she moaned. "He is in love with her, or he couldn't write so!"

"I hope to God he is, and will get, for the first time in his life, the treatment he deserves. So you would have allowed him to enter your room that night?" he hissed through his teeth.

She moaned and was silent.

"Now, do you realize to what you would have descended? He respects Edwina and despises you!—and you believed him your devoted lover! But for her you would by now have been utterly degraded—lowered in your own eyes and in the eyes of the very man who tried to encompass your fall. If anything can make you see the abyss from which you were saved, that letter should."

He tried to recover it, but his wife pushed it into her bosom.

"No, no! Let it be. I want it—I must have it to read again. I need it, if ever I am to recover my pride," she sobbed heart-brokenly.

"All right. Let it remain a monument to your folly and dishonour!"

He turned to leave the room, then noticing that she looked faint and ill, yielded to an unaccountable impulse, and carried her to her bed, placing her down among her pillows with extraordinary gentleness.

CHAPTER XI

SOCIAL AMENITIES

BAINBRIDGE returned to town when he felt that he could safely leave his household to look after itself. Edwina was deeply touched by his many kindnesses, and much distressed because she could never repay them. She had been engaged for a specific purpose, and before she had accomplished anything worth while she had fallen ill, and put them to heavy expenses! It seemed all wrong that she should be drawing a generous salary when she was almost useless in the house. Yet no argument had availed with her employer.

"When it comes to arguing, I shall some day prove to you that I am deeply in your debt," he had said, putting an end to the matter.

Edwina wondered if he could possibly know the truth, or if he was only being polite. She was made to rest on an easy-chair in the glazed veranda at tea-time, and it was there she received her friends. Billie came regularly and the boys frequently, their visits full of cheer.

Mrs. Bainbridge at first made a pathetic figure at these afternoon tea-parties, but soon she was to be seen about in her rickshaw and at the houses of her friends, all of whom took a delight in telling her how ill she looked. She knew she looked wan and older because of the dark semicircles under her eyes and the pallor of her skin,

but she did not find it agreeable to be told so. She tried her best to believe that she hated Jack Dysart, and went out of her way to avoid all chance of meeting him. Gradually, however, it could not be avoided, and she learned to bow quite in a natural way so that it would be noticed that they were still friends. If they met in a room of the Club, she even exchanged a word or two with him concerning the weather, all the while suppressing an inclination towards hysteria. It was very difficult and humiliating, when they had so lately been inseparable.

In the meantime, Edwina recovered at the villa, each day being able to do a little more.

One day, her stepmother called, full of surprise at the opulence of Edwina's circumstances. She did not know that the Bainbridges had such a "swell" house and so many servants. But she thought it necessary, lest Edwina should be thinking too much of herself, to tell her that it was a pity she had lost all her looks.

"I dare say, however, you will look better when you are yourself again," she said comfortingly. "It is surprising what a difference colour makes in the cheeks. That is why Society hussies paint theirs and colour their lips. Nothing in the world would make me resort to such flagrant deceit. It is like sailing under false pretences. A thousand times rather give me sallow cheeks and pale lips. At least one is *natural*, and naturalness is so refreshing! Don't ever you resort to the rouge-pot, Edwina."

"I might, if I am looking as you describe. No one wants to look ugly, and it is very harmless to make the best of one's appearance."

"Indeed! It is fast, and savours of the *demi-mondaine*," said Mrs. Hope, bristling as she always did when

contradicted by Edwina. "Men never admire the women who paint their faces, nor does it help one's self-respect to know one is deceiving the public!" and she readjusted the end of a switch of false hair which a mirror opposite showed was threatening to come down.

"But why?" asked Edwina disingenuously, her eyes on the difference of shade between the switch and the real hair, "why strain at gnats and swallow camels? Why object to rouge, and countenance false hair and teeth? You style one as improper and fast, while the others are 'justifiable'."

"Good gracious—! As if there isn't a vast difference between doing what is *necessary*, and what is done only for reasons of vanity! You have no sense of logic, Wina."

"Why have you to wear the switch?" ventured Edwina.

"Because—my hair is getting thin. You *are* personal, Edwina!"

"In order to make your hair look a respectable quantity you resort to a form of deceit. The public think——"

"How often haven't I told you that it is very unbecoming of you to argue with me? You are very rude, and it doesn't encourage me to come and see you." Mrs. Hope was growing agitated.

As Edwina was not anxious to encourage the visits of her stepmother, she pursued the subject just a little farther.

"I thought I was only proving my sense of logic," she said meekly. "People who don't shingle look so much better if they have plenty of hair to do up in a bun, and a little colour in the cheeks, even when artificial, is so pretty when Nature fails to supply it."

"I would rather not discuss the point with you, as you never seem to realize how rude you are."

"Then again," continued Edwina mildly, "why should dentists try to make false teeth look as natural as possible, if it isn't to deceive the public into imagining they are real? In fact, I once overheard a lady say what pretty teeth Mrs. Hope has!—that was after you had yours drawn and the American dentist gave you the false set."

"I think I'll go, as it is getting late and I don't like being out after dark unattended."

Edwina escorted her to the gate, and refrained from asking her to come again. It was a relief to think that she lived out of the station and did not find it too easy to come in for any but important reasons.

Mrs. Bainbridge's manner to Edwina was slightly reserved and cool in the days of the latter's convalescence, but she was too lonely to keep it up, and decided to return to the old friendly intimacy.

"You are such a puzzle to me," she said to Edwina one night, when they sat in their pyjamas before a fire conversing before parting for the night. With the breaking of the monsoons, the weather had become cold and damp, with low, drifting clouds that frequently enveloped the entire landscape in mists and driving rain.

"In which way do I puzzle you?" Edwina asked, dropping her stump of cigarette into the glowing grate.

"I can't help wondering how it is you don't despise me? Surely you must feel a contempt for a woman who could lose her head so completely over a man who was nothing but a conscienceless brute?"

"How could I feel a contempt for you?" cried Edwina. "Are we not friends? I like you too much to dream of anything like that!" The sincerity of her nature looked full at Mrs. Bainbridge out of her lustrous eyes.

"But you must think me very wicked—or weak—or despicable!"

"I—I think you are greatly to be pitied. I keep wishing I could help you. It is a tragedy that you should not be happy in such a beautiful home, and—and—with other things so many women haven't the luck to possess."

"Where lies the blame? Tell me. I often wish I knew. I did not want to love Jack Dysart—but it happened. Then—when the ice was broken and I allowed him to make love to me, by slow degrees, nothing seemed wrong for love. It came to pass that—I was ready to do—anything —rather than give him up."

"I know. That's to be expected if one temporizes with forbidden things. Your case is not unique, and I am sure it would be so with us all in the same circumstances. No one can be too sure of herself. I suppose it is a question of strength. If one could only be strong to resist—strong to deny oneself. Invincible! But who is?"

"You are very comforting. Basil and I are totally unsuited to each other. Like oil and water, it is impossible for us to mix. We only react on each other, and that is not the way to spend one's life."

"Have you ever tried hard to make things as you want them to be?"

"How do you mean?"

"For instance—but you will think it so presuming of me to say this?"

"Not at all. I love to listen to you. You are a brick, Wina. I have never known anyone like you."

"Then, what I was going to say is, have you looked for all the fine points in your husband's character? There are so many."

"I don't doubt it. But fine points don't appeal to a

bride or a wife who yearns for passionate love and meets with a tranquil devotion."

"At any rate, there is devotion! And passionate love might have been awakened—don't you think?"

"I was far too shy and proud to show that I longed to be loved as a human being and not a saint of God on a pedestal."

"Don't be shy, and do forget your pride, if ever you want love from a nature that is naturally calm and undemonstrative. You might, perhaps, have taught him that he was also very human. I had a friend at home who married a man something like that. He was so terribly contented after he married, that they were in danger of settling down like quite an old married couple. She told me it scared her stiff. So she thought out many little ways of keeping him keen, as in the beginning—that is, crazy about little things like her hair, and kissing, and being beautifully formed."

"You mean, she ceased to be modest and tried to attract him by appealing to the physical side of his nature?" Pearle asked nervously. "I never could do that."

"You quite mistake me," said Edwina, whose precocity in matrimonial matters was purely theoretical. "That would have been a fatal mistake. Reserve can be overdone, but it must not be abandoned altogether. My friend was careful to intrigue her husband in subtle ways, and it worked wonders. She turned him in the end into quite a passionate lover, without eyes or ears for anyone else. One of the things she did was to—to—I hardly like to say it!"

"Oh, do!" said Pearle.

"She had very beautiful lingerie—like cobwebs sown together—but she always hurried to put on something extra

just after he came into the room! Of course, he fell for her immediately!" Edwina's cheeks were crimson. "It was so much better than flaunting herself about the room with too little on. And then, she never asked to be petted or loved if he seemed tired or absent-minded. She was tactful, and chose her time, then lured him into noticing her, and in a little while he would be terribly lover-like! I never knew anyone so happy as she, and really she started out not dreadfully in love at all. She married him because it was the sensible thing to do, and he was worthy of respect and affection."

Mrs. Bainbridge was very still for a while, looking sad and downcast. "I suppose one lives and learns. Tact is born in some, but a proper understanding of life only comes after countless mistakes are made and retrieved. Unfortunately, some make mistakes past retrieving—which would have happened in my case if"—the tears rose to her eyes and her mouth quivered—"you hadn't saved the situation at terrible cost to yourself."

"I?—who told you?" Edwina was surprised, for she did not think that Captain Dysart would have given her away.

"I shall tell you in a moment, but I want you to believe that never had anything of that sort happened before——."

"I know that!"

She drew a letter from her pocket, and handed it to Edwina. "I brought it with me to-night to restore it to you. It is yours, though I believe you have never read it. You might remember telling my husband that he might read it aloud to you. He never did. He first read it to himself, and, when he said it was worthless and should be scrapped, you let him take it away, so little

did you care what became of a letter from Jack Dysart! Basil gave it to me for an object-lesson. As it happens, Jack wanted a reply, but as you would, probably, have written very rudely, silence was the best answer of all. It has taught him not to call any more, though he is still everywhere in the station."

Edwina recalled the incident, and read the letter through with a doubting heart. She had made up her mind never to believe that anything good could come out of a man capable of so much devilment. He was such a consummate actor that he was only trying to befool her and was amusing himself by this pose of humility as the first step in the game. Her contempt for him was too strong to be dispelled by a ruse of this kind, so she quietly put the letter into the flames.

There was little more said on the subject that night. Edwina tried to sleep, but it was impossible till the small hours of the morning, for the letter haunted her by its note of sincerity. Captain Dysart sincere? She scouted the idea, and tried to banish him from her mind, saying to him in imagination: "You cannot deceive me, Jack Dysart, for all that you have such an attractive kink in your hair and sea-blue eyes! Your suave lips are too used to lying for me to accept anything you may say. Find some other victim to succumb to your fatal attractions! They won't go down with Edwina Hope!"

She eventually fell asleep to dream that Captain Dysart was making passionate love to her, and that she was finding it a thrilling experience. With his arms round her, her form held close, his lips on hers, holding her breathless, she knew an ecstasy akin to pain. She awoke trembling in every limb from the realism of that kiss, feeling that it was the most wonderful dream of her

life. If a man's kisses had the power to raise her to such a Heaven of response as did these phantom kisses of Captain Dysart's, then, married to the man she loved, life would be rich with delight.

Soon after this, Mrs. Bainbridge, who was very lonely in the midst of a host of so-called friends, insisted upon taking Edwina about with her, and thus she gradually increased her circle of friends. When Billie was there, he seldom gave anyone else a chance of occupying the place at her side. The men found her interesting and attractive, but the women treated her with cool condescension, especially as it was discovered that she came of no distinguished family. Moreover, they did not recognize her right to make free with the Club when she was in the position of shorthand-typist to Mr. Bainbridge. Edwina knew that society at Rajpahar was very snobbish, but it did not trouble her, for she did not admire the ways of Anglo-Indian Society in that salubrious hill-station. She, who disliked senseless conventions and hidebound customs, was revolted at the freedom of the women in so-called good Society, and the manners of the men roused her contempt.

She constantly met Captain Dysart whom she systematically cut. Mrs. Bainbridge, however, acknowledged him with studied coldness, but, as he never invited a conversation, they never spoke to each other. One night on her return from a dinner-party at the doctor's, she was full of agitation and distress. Her hostess had sent her in to dinner with Captain Dysart! She was apparently behind the times and had not heard that they were no longer on terms of friendly intimacy.

"I was so upset and worried," said Mrs. Bainbridge, "that I could scarcely eat a morsel. Thank Heaven I

had a nice boy on my right, so that it rather helped out! but Jack was absolutely unconcerned. He talked to me just as if there had never been anything in the world between us. I was amazed at his self-possession! He actually asked after you!"

"What did he want to know about me?" asked Edwina, with an unaccountable fluttering of the heart. It was a strange thing, but ever since her mad dream, the mention of Captain Dysart gave her a curious leap of the heart and quickened pulses.

"He only wanted to know if you were quite strong again. He thought you were looking rather frail this evening at the Club."

"I shall be glad if he ceases to observe me and comment on my looks."

"I longed to tell him so, but all I could say was 'yes', and 'no'. That's the worst of me. I get so tongue-tied when I am embarrassed. What do you think he said when we were just about leaving the table? As he held my chair, he said that he wanted to call some day, if it was convenient to me. Have you ever heard such audacity?"

"And what did you say?"—Edwina was startled and shocked.

"I just managed to say that I did not think it would be convenient this season."

"Bravo! You would be foolish to let him come. Besides, why should he?"

"He has some motive behind it all, and it has nothing to do with me, so I suppose it is you."

"Surely that's not possible!" said Edwina.

"It *is* possible," said Mrs. Bainbridge. "I am beginning to realize it is only the unattainable that attracts

Jack Dysart. He was mad about me till I showed him, like a fool, that I cared terribly for him. From that time, he was too sure of me to worry; and when I was silly enough to make myself cheap, he didn't care at all. Now he's wild to make you notice him, because you are the only girl in the station—the only woman, for that matter—who treats him like a cipher when he is accustomed to being petted and spoiled. So he regards you as the unattainable, and, consequently, he'll not rest till he has won you over."

"If that is his game," said Edwina, "I am quite ready to play it—if only to prove to him that he's going to be the loser."

Mrs. Bainbridge looked like a sulky child. Since her love affair with Jack Dysart had ended so humiliatingly, she resented his trying to be friendly with Edwina. When she explained her feeling in the matter, however, Edwina reassured her, saying that attentions from Captain Dysart would be too unwelcome to be endured.

CHAPTER XII

AN ACCIDENT

The secret of Edwina's success with men was a great mystery to Mrs. Bainbridge. She could hardly be considered pretty, but for her eyes and mouth, and she never put herself out for any man. Pearle Bainbridge's experience of life had led her to believe that men were charmed by the women who laid themselves out to attract in a thousand daring ways to which she herself could never stoop. Hers was not a sensual nature, so she had never tried to appeal to the sex instinct in men, and they had spoken of her as a mere doll! Having heard this from a bosom friend, she had tried to be different. At the psychological moment, Captain Dysart came into her life and she had fallen in love for the first time, sincerely and passionately. Because she let him know it, his ardour had cooled. Apparently, men preferred to be kept guessing. They did not want to feel that love was made easy. She had given too much—indeed, she would have given her all, had she not been stopped in time.

For his insincerity and cruelty, Edwina had "flay-d" him, and from that moment he was hers if she will-d. She did not will it, and her real scorn scared him. Nevertheless, Mrs. Bainbridge saw that he was intrigued, his interest growing in proportion to Edwina's indifference. Even she, who was no reader of character, could see that

he was angling for Edwina's acquaintance. But Edwina herself had a very different explanation. She believed his object was revenge. He had sworn to be even with her, to make her take back all she had said, and was working for that end.

"*You* could punish him, Wina. I wish you would," said Mrs. Bainbridge, her feeling growing revengeful.

"I? I don't play that game with a man who is a past-master at it," was Edwina's retort. "He is altogether without heart, and, consequently, will always escape punishment. I'd rather leave him alone."

However, it secretly amused Edwina to see Captain Dysart, who had never troubled his head to notice such juniors as Billie Hutchins and his contemporaries in the Service, go out of his way to be charming to them. They were her friends, openly her champions, each and all ready to do anything for her she could name. So Captain Dysart offered them drinks, took Billie out to luncheon, showed the boys the horse he was to ride in the races, and so captivated them that they were ready to forgive him everything he had done in the past.

"Awfully decent fellow," said one.

"A real sport," said another.

"Not so bad, after all!" Billie allowed.

If Billie had known of that disastrous meeting under the starlight he would never have forgiven Dysart, but Edwina had carefully misled him, for Mrs. Bainbridge's sake, one day when he had opened the subject which she thought her illness had made him forget.

"'Member that evening, Wina, when we had that ride together? It was the night preceding your illness. I have so wanted to know if anything happened. You'll recall that you were going to keep guard as Dysart was

likely to be on the prowl—what? Did he come, or not?"

After pretending absolute vacancy on the point, Edwina suddenly remembered perfectly, and laughed. "What a pair of private detectives we were, old thing! How sure we were we had got on a wonderful scent! But there was nothing doing. After a very wakeful night and walking about in draughts, I was forced to believe it had all been a mistake."

"You don't say so!—but it sounded very definite."

"Probably, but she must have put an end there and then to proposals from him that were impossible to her, for, ever since, they have cooled off."

"Yes, that's true. I suspect old Dysart is a bit of a rascal and got too—what is it the Americans call it?—'fresh'. Good word! So she ticked him off. Quite right, too." Then Billie went on to say that it would be a fine thing for fellows like Dysart if more women showed that they respected themselves too much to be let down by any man.

"You may not know it," said he, "but that Cavil woman—husband in the Indian Civil—is angling to get Dysart back again. He was very thick there before he went around with Mrs. Bainbridge, and she was as jealous as you make 'em. Just watch her now if he is about. Fairly throws herself at him."

"I dare say he enjoys it."

"I dunno. He manages to look fed up to the teeth."

Shortly afterwards, Billie was seen arm in arm with Captain Dysart, and Edwina was ashamed to think of her lie which had done the trick.

One memorable Sunday, Billie called to say that he had passed an exam. and that now everything would

be plain sailing. Perhaps Edwina would change her mind and become his wife? He spoke in a very manly fashion, with eager yearning in his honest eyes, and Edwina was angry with herself that his emotion left her cold.

"Oh, I am so distressed, Bill dear!" she cried, full of contrition for what could not be helped. "But I like you so much—I love you as a pal. Why wasn't I another boy?"

"But comradeship is a splendid foundation for matrimony, Wina."

"Comradeship and a special quality of love—not that which makes us like two boys together. Do see once and for all that it is impossible. If you cannot, then, I am only making you unhappy and we had better not meet."

"Oh, chuck that! I am not such a weakling that I should go about looking like a chief mourner because I can't make you fall in love with me. Half a loaf is better than no bread, so if I can't have you for my wife, I must be content with you as a pal. I wouldn't change my pal, Wina, for any other in the world. Why, old girl, I'd be lost without you now. You are a habit with me. I have to come along and talk horse-sense with you for awhile, or I don't feel things are right, somehow."

They had reached so far in the discussion when a confusion of hurrying footsteps and excited voices without startled them and brought them to their feet. Through the panes of glass in the veranda they could see a crowd of hillmen collected at the gate and a few English strangers hurriedly mounting the steps.

"Quick!" she heard one of them say, "there isn't time to lose."

"Miss Sahib," a servant in the doorway cried incoherently—"it's the baba. Tell to the Memsahib that Bizzie Baba has fallen down the *khud*. He gone far down and lying like dead."

Instantly, the whole house was in a commotion. Mrs. Bainbridge, who was resting in her room before afternoon tea, rushed out in a state of dementia. How did it happen? No one could tell her till the *ayah* ran in, weeping loudly and throwing herself about.

"My baba!—he not listen—he run to pick flower on *khud*, and I catching him too late! Let the Goot God kill me now!—why this thing be? He so quick, I try to stop him, but he laughing and not looking, climb rail and bend over!—oh, my lort! how I live to tell it? Before my eyes he go—down—down!" The woman collapsed on the floor in a fit of weeping, but no one had time to offer her comfort, as everyone rushed to the scene of the accident.

One eye-witness said that the child was seen to leave his *ayah* and run to the fencing at the edge of the hillside, and before she could reach him, he, full of mischief and laughter and proud of having escaped from detention, reached too far forward for the coveted flower. The next moment he lost his balance and disappeared. Some gentlemen who were riding past abandoned their mounts and ran to the scene of the confusion. A few made futile attempts to descend the face of the precipice, and returned with great difficulty. Only one refused to abandon the attempt. One other person, a native of Bhutan, a coolie, was also descending behind him, having been offered a large bribe to do so by some men who were unequal to the effort themselves.

People continued to arrive from all parts, as the news

spread that the Bainbridge baby had fallen down the *khud* and that an attempt was being made, under perilous circumstances, to rescue him.

Very soon the police were on the spot, organizing a rescue. Everyone had advice to offer, while the mother collapsed at the sight of her babe lying far below, caught in the centre of a tree fern, motionless and, to all appearances, dead. A young doctor from the neighbourhood was attending on her, and friends were offering consolation. To Edwina, it seemed that all Rajpahar was hurrying to the scene. They lined the railing that bordered the precipice, straining to look over, each pronouncing an opinion on the chances of rescue. Edwina, who at first could not get near the edge for the crowds that had collected, heard people talking of the madness it was for anyone to have gone down before a rope could be brought with which to protect him from certain death, should he miss his footing.

"These *paharias* are like hill goats, it is different in their case, but sheer foolhardiness for an Englishman to attempt such a risk."

"Who is it down there?" was asked on all sides, as necks were craned to get a glimpse of the intrepid one's progress, no one doubting that a second and greater tragedy was about to be witnessed.

"How neglectful *ayahs* are!" said a voice which Edwina recognized as Mrs. Cavil's. "It is like the mother to leave her child to servants while she is enjoying herself elsewhere."

"Who is it down there?" someone asked again. No one seemed able to answer till a man passing hurriedly cried out:

"It's Jack Dysart—he knows the kid, and nothing could stop him."

"Good God!" shrieked Mrs. Cavil. "He'll be killed!"

"Hush!" called someone.

"Let me look—I must see him—oh, my God! he, of all men!" In her excitement she lost all self-control and ran like a lunatic, pulling people away so that she might get a chance of looking down the hillside.

Edwina felt a sudden tightening of the heart when she heard that Captain Dysart was the venturesome Englishman who had dared to attempt that dangerous descent. At that moment, Billie drew her along to a spot he saw was likely to give them a view of the operations taking place below, and they climbed the rail to a ledge made by rocks and tree-trunks, and found that they could see quite well. Two figures, one well below the other, and looking like flies on a wall, were creeping along the face of the precipice, choosing fresh footholds that looked precarious and unsafe as they gradually moved downwards to a jutting platform on which grew an abundance of verdure. Saplings, tree ferns, bracken, and moss intermingled, while cradled in the midst of a spreading tree fern could be seen the light form of the child, showing no sign of life.

"Billie, do you think he will make it?"

"He'll get there or die in the attempt. That's Dysart. Oh, Wina, he's a man!"

"Unfortunately, Billy, a very bad man!" Edwina murmured, glad to remind her bounding heart of the fact.

"Whatever his follies, he isn't bad. I dare say he's done a good few rotten things where women are concerned—but generally they have asked for it. To-day, he stands alone. He's great!" Billie's boyish admiration knew no bounds.

"He is brave—no one denies that—but in all else he is despicable."

"He's profoundly human, and the life he has led has made him devil-may-care. But in spite of it all I—oh, God!—did you see that!" Billie gasped, for Captain Dysart had missed his footing and in a moment would have crashed downwards hundreds of feet, but for the strength of dangling roots which held. In a moment he was back again, and amid breathless silence above was creeping steadily lower and lower. "I thought he was gone, that time! I don't think you had better look on," said he, glancing at Edwina's white intense face. "It is too much for a woman."

"Since when have you considered me an hysterical coward, Billie? I'll stand anything you can."

"Did you hear that shriek when he slipped? I'll bet it was Mrs. Cavil."

"Oh, don't please talk," cried Edwina, wound up to a high pitch of excitement. "It gets on my nerves."

"Sorry," said Billie.

"Oh, Billie, forgive me!—I'm so thrilled. My nerves are on edge, for I am longing and praying that he'll do it. I—I hate failure. I adore success. Of course," she added, "I would feel just the same if he were a coolie."

"Of course," said Billie, who knew how she disliked the individual. Nevertheless, neither of them had any eyes for the bare-footed coolie who descended in Dysart's wake.

In mute suspense they watched the slow descent, and winced whenever stones, dislodged from the hillside, rattled below. At the bottom of the hill was a waterfall dancing in its downward course with foam and spray. The sunlight tipped the crystal drops turning them into

jewels scattered in the air, while the rush and roar of the water sounded like breakers on a sea-beach. Between the road and the waterfall there were fir trees and saplings, and bare rocks jutting outward, with here and there a shelf covered with wild growths of ferns and moss.

Once there was a shower of stones which narrowly escaped sending Captain Dysart to the bottom. In the meantime a constable arrived with a stout rope, sent for by Billie. It was lowered in silence and reached Captain Dysart after he had sprung down to the ledge on which the boy lay.

Cheers rose on the air and women wept hysterically as Captain Dysart rescued the child from his perilous position. He then passed the rope under his own armpits, carefully knotted it, and was hauled up to the top, the child held close to his breast.

Many hands eagerly assisted to pull him upward, his friends crowding round him with praise and congratulations. Edwina, with a lump in her throat, found her way to Pearle Bainbridge, just as Billie put her boy into her arms. While the doctor made his examination, Bizzie came to, whimpering from the pain in his head.

"He's all right," said the doctor to Mrs. Bainbridge. "Cheer up! Only a little concussion which he will sleep off. Take him home and put him to bed."

The *ayah*, who was weeping with joy, insisted upon carrying him, and Mrs. Bainbridge was free to think of Bizzie's rescuer.

"Wina, they say it was Captain Dysart who saved him! —is it true?"

"I watched him do it," said Wina, the lump in her throat still there. "It was wonderful—amazing!"

"I always knew that he is absolutely fearless. I should thank him, shouldn't I?—but I don't know what to say—I have hardly spoken to him since—since—that time!"

"Oh, you must!—look!—he is going—run and tell him you will always remember to-day with gratitude."

Captain Dysart could be seen with a group of men and Mrs. Cavil clinging to his arm, all moving in the direction of the Mall. He seemed to be making several efforts to free himself and a diversion was created by the arrival of Mrs. Bainbridge, who like a tutored child said self-consciously:

"Oh, J—Jack! how wonderful of you! I shall always remember this day with gratitude."

"Everyone is making far too much of it," he answered crossly. "Hill climbing is as easy as breathing to me. I have done it hundreds of times in the Alps." He shook himself free and, mounting his horse, rode quickly off.

Edwina remained behind. What was Captain Dysart thinking of her for holding aloof at such a time? she wondered. It would have been a common act of appreciation for her to have said something—anything—even "Well done!" But she had stood apart, pretending not to be interested and now was inclined to be a little sorry that she had not unbent.

Yet, she was not able to forget that it was this very hillside down which, he had said, he was quite capable of flinging her!—Under the starlight, in the darkness and the shadows, he had said it, and had allowed her to recoil in horror, calling him a murderer at heart. If he had been amusing himself at her expense, he had done so with every appearance of truth.

The memory of that night would for ever stand betv een her and Captain Dysart, and any unbending from her could only be misleading. She would not have him think that he had conquered her by his act of daring. Therefore, when Billie and others eulogized him, she was studiously silent.

CHAPTER XIII

RECRIMINATIONS

Basil Bainbridge arrived the next day for the week-end and Pearle, his wife, froze in his presence. She explained afterwards to Edwina that her husband was contemptuous of her since her folly, which would always make their meetings awkward and unpleasant. The best that could happen would be for them to live apart, and she was seriously thinking of asking for a judicial separation. The child? Of course he would stay with his mother! the idea of supposing that she would give him up! Basil would, of course, make a fuss, but he would not be deprived of access to his boy. Surely he would not dare to say that a mother had not the greatest right to her children?

Though her argument was not logical, it was intensely human, and Edwina wondered what would be the upshot of it all. As it was the height of the rains, her going home to England was out of the question. That would be arranged for in the spring; in the meantime, husband and wife continued their pretence of unity before the world, and only Edwina who was behind the scenes knew of the actual state of affairs.

Bainbridge was greatly touched by the story of Captain Dysart's heroic rescue of his little son. He relented towards him completely, especially as he could see that there was

no further cause for his jealousy. The sign manual of their restored friendship was a drink together at the Club.

One afternoon, walking along the hill roads with Edwina, Mr. Bainbridge was more than usually confidential. What did she think of Pearle? Was she getting over that damned affair with Dysart? Had it not been for his saving the child's life, he would have had nothing to do with the fellow, but—hang it!—he had atoned. After all, his wife was very young. It seemed a shame that she should be tied to a husband whom she didn't love. It might be possible to trump up an action for divorce against himself—he could pretend to give her cause during any of his absences, but the only thing that deterred him was his boy. He had a great affection for his kid and hoped to be proud of him some day. Besides, he knew that he would meet with great opposition from Sir Thomas who had no patience with his daughter's foolishness. He could not understand why a woman could not set herself to make the best of life if married to a man worthy of her respect. Nevertheless, Basil thought it but right to allow people to choose their own happiness, so he was puzzled what to do.

"I would, of course, marry again," said he, looking shyly at Edwina, the colour rising in his square-jawed face, his eyes strangely tender. "I don't know if you consider me too old, for I am in my fortieth year—in the prime of life, they say. I am capable of making the right sort of woman happy, but, of course, it would depend upon whether the woman—girl—I am thinking of"—again a stolen glance at Edwina's face that would not have deceived a child—"would favour me. If there was any hope, I'd go ahead and manufacture a divorce—otherwise, I won't think of it."

"I suppose you would both marry again," said Edwina. "Only I am sorry to think that it should ever come to that. It is quite possible that you will both be very happy some day. The present is not everything. It will be gone, and the future is in your hands. Why not try again?" asked Edwina. "If you made mistakes in the past—and I suppose you did, or you might have made your wife care very much for you, especially after the baby came—you might think of something that will improve matters instead of making them worse. For instance, take a holiday and give her a good time, sharing it. Be good to her—be tender and kind and loving. Above all, be loving in a thousand ways that girls appreciate. That is my advice to you. Don't resent what is past. Forget it. Look to the future and let her see how generous you can be. She is nothing if not affectionate, so it might succeed."

"I am afraid that Pearle and I have nothing in common. I should have for my wife a girl—like someone I know—a little wise-head who understands the meaning of duty and has the pride of Lucifer." He was overcome with self-consciousness and could say no more. Edwina shattered his dreams straightforwardly and effectually.

"I have no sympathy with those who change their loves as they would their coats. Personally, I should hate to marry a divorced man whose wife is alive. It is not my idea of marriage. If you will make up your mind to try all over again with your wife it is a good time to begin, for you might get her 'on the rebound', as they say. I wish you the best of luck."

They walked back in silence to the house.

A week later Edwina met Captain Dysart for the first time after the accident, at a charity concert. Billie, who was her escort, was called away in the middle of the

performance to the scene of a bazaar row, so that Edwina had to face the walk home alone, for she refused to let him find her a man to take his place.

All through the performance she was conscious of Captain Dysart standing in a doorway looking his attractive self, thoroughly at home and indifferent to his company. He had been away on another bear-hunt and had just returned, she heard people saying around her, for everyone always seemed interested in Dysart's affairs.

During the last item on the programme, she decided to slip out and hurry home. To stay to the last, might make Captain Dysart feel it encumbent on him to see her home. He was quite daring enough to take the initiative, for though she did no more than acknowledge him because the Bainbridges still did so, she was sure that he would have things out with her some day.

As she reached the street, the moonlight gave her confidence, for objects were as bright as day, with black shadows and a silver edge to the leaves, the roofs, and palings.

There were no pedestrians to be seen, nor any vehicle after she passed the throng of rickshaws and dandies outside the hall, but it was not long before she heard footsteps coming up from behind, and knew instinctively that they belonged to Captain Dysart.

"May I walk with you?" his voice asked, before he was beside her. "I saw Billie Hutchins go and heard that he would not be back to see you home, so I came to offer myself as your escort."

"And if I would rather walk alone?"

"Then I shall fall behind. The road is free to all."

"You are very unselfish."

"Not a bit of it. I am utterly selfish. I was in hopes

you would be less stern with me after all this time—months, isn't it?—and my continued good behaviour." He spoke with a whimsical humour and a charm that was undeniable. "I feel as if I have lived years instead of months since . . ." his voice trailed away.

"Since when?" she asked.

"Since you slew the old Jack Dysart and the new one came to life."

"I don't wish to be reminded of the past," said she gravely. "If you must see me to my gate, let it be as if we are new acquaintances."

"That would be rather difficult, seeing how much I owe you."

"Yet, if the old 'Jack Dysart' is dead, you must of necessity be a new acquaintance," said she, trying not to smile.

"But I am not new to you *to-day*. I was new the day you fell ill and I nursed you."

"What are you talking about? You nursed me!"

"Don't you remember it? I suppose you don't, for your fever ran high. When I last took your temperature, you were a hundred and five, which put the wind up me, and——"

"Please don't talk nonsense!"

"I am not, I assure you. I nursed you till Mrs. Bainbridge was fetched from the bazaar—she had a tall and——"

"Am I to believe that all this is true?"

"Ask Mrs. Bainbridge, if you don't believe me—or ask the *ayah*. I thought they would surely have told you. You gave me a terrible fright, for I thought you were going to die and that I would have your death on my conscience to the end of my days."

"But—how did you happen to be with me?"

"You sent for me yourself—try to think——"

Edwina had a faint recollection that what he said was true. "What happened then?"

"You were a bit incoherent. You wanted to extract a promise from me to be good, but were doubtful whether such a bad man could be trusted to keep his word."

"It was very kind of you," said Edwina.

"You never answered my letter."

"I did not receive it till long afterwards, when the necessity to reply had passed," said she.

"You might have sent me a line explaining the fact! Do you still think me all the despicable things you did that night?"

"With a few modifications. I think you behaved with wonderful courage when you saved the Bainbridge baby. You were splendid. But then you are a soldier, so I suppose you are hardened to dangers—as you are hardened to acts of violence—you were quite equal to throwing me down the *khud*."

Dysart threw back his head and laughed heartily. "Of course, I remember now!—and you believed all this time that I had murderous instincts?"

"All through my illness the memory of it haunted me so that I was either falling or had fallen down the *khud*. The nurse said I couldn't think of anything else!"

"Oh!" Dysart exclaimed remorsefully. "That was terrible. I was a brute to have frightened you! Still, you did not really think I would have done it—come now!"

"I did."

"You baby!—I remember you said I was a murderer at heart! It was very funny. But I lost my sense of

umour when you became ill. And it was impossible to ecover it afterwards when you persisted in treating me ike a leper. After all, you will admit that I kept my romise to quit?"

"Yes."

"And you'll also admit that there has been no gossip oncerning my misdoings, since?"

"I haven't heard any."

"Why then do you persist in treating me badly?"

"Does it matter? I—we—are the merest acquaintances —soon you will be gone—or I shall be gone—and we shall ot meet again."

"Still, for the time that is left, you might encourage ny efforts towards regeneration, by being kind!"

He was very determined! Edwina hurried her steps. Unless she could get away, she felt that he would succeed n making her promise to be friends. She was not sure hat she cared to become friendly with Captain Dysart, whom she felt she would never be able to trust; and, noreover, because of a certain unforgettable dream, she referred not to have anything to do with him.

"I have no wish to be unkind," she said coldly. "I only hink that, our lines being cast in different places, the less ve have to do with each other, the better. I am glad to hink that you were capable of keeping your word. I see hat you are not altogether dishonourable, but I have no eason to be confident that you will not backslide."

"So you continue to flay me!"

"Here's the house. I thank you, Captain Dysart, for aking the trouble to see me home."

"Are you always going to treat me with disdain? You re so charming to Bill Hutchins and others, but to me— n icicle!"

"Good night," said she in a softer tone. She was ashamed of her persistent snubbing. "It is very late and time all good little boys and girls were asleep."

"Good night," said he with peculiar tenderness, holding out his hand.

Edwina, however, pretended not to see it, and, turning, ran inside without a backward look. Once safely within the front door, she discovered that she was trembling from head to foot. It was ridiculous, she told herself; utterly unreasonable that she should be so moved and so undisciplined. What did it mean? Angry and determined not to admit the obvious reason for her seething emotions, she escaped to her room, glad that Mrs. Bainbridge had already retired and that there was no one to be a witness to her unnerved state.

Jack Dysart strolled homewards to his hotel, deep in thought. At least she had said *good night* and not *good-bye*. There would be other opportunities for forcing her to admit him into the charmed circle of her friendship. Her very elusiveness made her infinitely more worth cultivating, and he was more than ever determined to earn her regard.

CHAPTER XIV

A CHANGE

URPRISING things happen. When next Basil Bainbridge rived at the villa, he seemed restless and harped on the ed of a thorough and complete change. Rajpahar was ot exactly what was necessary to "buck him up" and give m the necessary fillip. It was a glorified town with l the envy, hatred, and malice to be found where society ngregates, and little chance of refreshment for the tired orker.

All this he discoursed upon during a meal. Then he rew his bombshell.

Perhaps Pearle would like to take a trip with him to ashmere? She, too, was looking "off-colour" and it would o her all the good in the world.

Since a visit to Cashmere had been Mrs. Bainbridge's eam of delight, her eyes widened with surprise and easure. "Cashmere?—oh!—could it be done? It was ch a business travelling with a child and an *ayah*!—d children usually were so easily upset." Her face fell if it was quite out of the question, and the idea would ve to be abandoned.

"I don't propose to take the entire family," said inbridge, for the *bandobust** would be too harassing. 'm for a peaceful holiday in a perfectly glorious spot,

*Organization

new faces, new scenes, everything new and recuperating
Perhaps Wina will help us out and stay here with the ki
and *ayah*?" He looked earnestly at Edwina, wh
immediately sensed his object and was thrilled wit
pleasure. He had been thinking things over and wante
to adopt her advice. His long and meaning glance was
revelation. "You see," he continued, "the doctor coul
have a look at him occasionally, so if you care about it
—to his wife—"we'll take the jaunt. At least, that is
if you will put up with my society? I promise not t
be a nuisance" (looking embarrassed), "so you can decide
You will, of course, be as free as air."

"I—I like the idea," said Pearle, trying not to show ho
greatly it appealed to her.

"You can count on me," said Edwina. "But what abou
the book?"

"We'll put it on the shelf for a while, and go hard a
it when we get together again—probably in Calcutta, afte
the season here is over."

"You are proposing a very idle time for me," sai
Edwina. "I hardly think it fair to draw a salary!"

"Oh, Wina!" cried Mrs. Bainbridge. "As if we coul
do without you!"

"You dare say such a thing again!" Mr. Bainbridg
glared ferociously. "Your duties are merely transferred.

Edwina blushed and thanked them both. She wa
seeing Basil Bainbridge in a new and surprising mood-
unobtrusive in his attentions to his wife, and very kind
Even she was rendered tongue-tied by the surprisin
change. The new mood had brought with it a softer lool
a kindlier smile.

"If it is possible, I should like to start in a few day
What do you think?" he asked his wife. "There's n

much good in hanging on here with such crowds coming up for the holidays next month, and so much racket going on. Would you prefer to stay?"

"Not at all. I have been wishing very much to get away, but did not know where I could get to!" she returned, gratefully. "It is a good idea to try Cashmere. Shall we live in a houseboat?"

"Yes, that's the plan. Well—that's settled. If you can get ready, we'll start in the middle of the week."

Pearle looked a different woman for the rest of the day, her mind filled with the prospect of the change to Cashmere.

"It was a brain-wave of Basil's," said she, to Edwina, "and it is so good of you to stay and have an eye to baby. Of course, you need not do a thing. His *ayah* is absolutely efficient. Only if he is not well or you have any anxiety, get the doctor."

"I am delighted to be of use to you both—you have been so good to me."

"Not nearly so good as you have been to me," said Pearle, kissing her affectionately. "You must call me Pearle. I can never think of you as a stranger, Wina!"

Edwina helped her to pack so that there was no difficulty in getting her ready to start with her husband on the day arranged. As the day drew near, Pearle Bainbridge revived visibly. The colour returned to her cheeks, her eyes looked brighter, and she was full of excitement.

On the night before the journey as they sat in Edwina's room for a last confidential talk, she exclaimed like a child:

"Oh, how I have wanted to see Cashmere! But I never could get Basil to go, and you know I am too great a coward to go anywhere alone. Isn't it grand that he should have, out of a clear sky, fixed on that spot of all others?"

"Splendid!" said Wina who guessed exactly why her husband had chosen Cashmere. "I hope you'll have a lovely time—and—Pearle," she whispered sympathetically, "this is going to be the opportunity of your life to grow better acquainted with Basil. You will find that he is a fine fellow underneath all his reserve. Perhaps he will shed a good deal of that reserve at Cashmere. Remember my friend whose story I related to you. She did wonders. You will do the same and be so glad, later, that you made the effort to know and love him."

"We don't love to order, Wina."

"I know. But love begets love, and he still cares for you in spite of all that is past, or he would not have thought of doing what pleases you most. This trip is undertaken purely to make you happy."

It came to pass the very next morning, while Pearle collected her last necessities for the departure, that Edwina was alone with Bainbridge and a discussion took place.

He was in a perverse mood and full of pessimism, so that Edwina had little patience for him. It was his plaint that men married for domestic peace and happiness, and were badly disillusioned.

"You are short-sighted," said Edwina. "Though we are often disillusioned by things not turning out as we want them to, it doesn't mean that they will never come right. If we knew anything of the lives of other couples who started as you did, without mutual love, I am sure we would find that they have been through much the same trouble. Some 'down tools', so to speak, and others exercise patience and win in the end. You have to be prepared to wipe the slate clean and begin afresh. Never think of the past. It is finished. A new page is turned.

Tolerance and kindness are unfailing aids to a happy ending."

"You are full of noble theories, young woman, but you aren't practical. One is tempted to dissolve partnership if the contract is not working."

"Feeling so, why are you taking your wife to Cashmere?" she asked.

"That is something that defies explanation," he replied, after a thoughtful pause. "I don't like to see her looking pinched and delicate. Her recent folly has left her feeling cheap—her self-respect is suffering over it. It is bad to feel one has let oneself down. Pearle is not a vamp and a flirt, and she is knocked out of time. To restore her to her normal, healthy outlook, a change is necessary. Then why not Cashmere, which she has hankered to see? New faces, new scenes, and she'll find herself again and readjust her perspective."

"All of which proves that you are still devoted to her. May as well be honest about it."

"Habit is second nature, I suppose."

"It has been your habit to care for her, and love is not easily killed."

"I have ceased to idolize her, if you would have the truth, but—hang it!—she's the kid's mother and I have begun to feel that I want to put things right between us if it's possible."

"Let her see that you love her still, no matter the past, and she is sure to turn to you, first in gratitude, and then in love. She is at present to be pitied. The world is very grey and dark, and life is altogether uninspiring. She needs love and plenty of sympathy, and I could imagine her completely vanquished by a husband who showed that he was broad-minded enough and sporting enough to understand and forgive."

A long silence followed which was broken by Pearie herself who entered ready for the journey, and they left soon after for the station, a cavalcade of two rickshaws, and a string of coolies carrying the baggage.

When the train had gone, Edwina met her stepmother on the station road dressed in defiance of the prevailing mode, in a hat which was perched upon her head and a skirt that flapped at her ankles, while her waist was closely defined, and her feet looked heavy in round-toed brogues.

To show no ill-feeling, Edwina stopped and spoke to her, thinking to interest her with her news. She was all alone in her glory with nothing to do but read library books and keep an eye on the baby. Had Mrs. Hope heard of the baby's accident? She imagined that everyone had heard of it, since it had been described by a spectator in the *Rajpahar Mail*. Edwina related the circumstances graphically. The *ayah*, having had a bad fright, was doubly careful of the child. There was nothing like such an experience to make a servant over-zealous in the performance of a duty.

Mrs. Hope was very disapproving during the recital, and censorious concerning Edwina's own position. What were the Bainbridges about to leave a young girl like her alone in the house without a married woman as her chaperon!

"What do you fear?" Edwina asked.

"Gossip. People will have a handle for saying all sorts of things, and if, by any chance, men commit the indiscretion of calling on you, your name will be gone!—Indeed, it might affect your matrimonial chances. Many a girl has become an old maid by disregarding the conventions."

"I am so glad to know that," said Edwina with twinkling eyes. "Shall I put a notice in the paper that I shall not be at home to masculine callers?"

"You need not make a point of it," said Mrs. Hope, glad to see that, for once, Edwina was open to advice. "Your best plan will be to have a chaperon. It happens that I am on leave, spending a few days with old friends in turn, and I am sure you will think it a good idea if I excuse myself to them on the score that I am needed by you. People will then have no occasion to talk. There are so many women in Rajpahar who make it their business to ferret out the concerns of others, only for the sake of scandalizing them. I am appalled to think of the things they will say of you, if you are to live alone. In fact, I can get an extension of leave. It will make things so comfortable, for then you can have anyone over. I may not approve of the way things are done in Society, but I am quite willing to be a spectator, and I am sure you will find that I can hold my own with the best. Don't forget that I was governess to Lady Musgrove's children before I married your father. Sir Benjamen Musgrove was a contractor during the War and was knighted for services rendered to his country. I saw quite a great deal of very exclusive people. The swells that——"

"But I don't in the least mind not being chaperoned," said Edwina, the moment she had the chance.

"It is not what you mind, my dear, but what is proper. I shan't in any way interfere with you, if that's your fear. I don't mind going to the Club and being sociable. Indeed, I used to play quite a good game of tennis when I was with Lady——"

"I don't think you realize—" Edwina found it almost impossible to stem the torrent of her stepmother's eloquence.

"—Musgrove, and a little practice will give me back my strokes," Mrs. Hope continued, determined to be heard. "As a matter of fact, I would be glad to give up my present position on the tea garden, as—" she dropped her voice confidentially "—the planters are too free-and-easy to suit my ideas of decorum. Some drink too freely. It is so unpleasant when men are not quite masters of themselves. I could have married one of them when the period of mourning is over, only it seemed that he was not quite himself when he proposed, and took it back the next day."

"Took what back?"

"The proposal, child. So you see how little faith one can repose in men who drink? Never marry any but a total abstainer. That is my intention should I be tempted to marry again. When would you like me to come? Any day will suit me. I have not unpacked yet, fortunately, so——"

"I am afraid, Mrs. Hope, I cannot ask you to be my guest, as I haven't the authority to do so," said Edwina, frankly.

"Then you mean to say that you are going to fly in the face of convention by living *alone*?" The osprey on Mrs. Hope's hat vibrated threateningly.

Edwina bit her lips to restrain her laughter.

"Yes, for I am not conventional and dislike shams. It takes two to make a scandal, so, as I shall be living *alone*——"

"Don't be too clever! You were always quick in the up-take, which has amounted to rudeness again and again. It is time you learned to respect your seniors. I am afraid that you have very little regard for the feelings of your relations if you mean to annoy them with acts

of flagrant impropriety. Your poor, dear, late father would turn in his grave if he saw you now with your skirts —indecent, I call them—and the rouge on your cheeks!"

"The colour happens to be natural, this time——"

"Tell that to the marines!" cried Mrs. Hope, angrily. "All I know is, if a girl can wear such short skirts, Heaven atone knows what she reveals when she sits down! It is just this modern craze for attracting men, no matter how, that makes you young people disgrace your sex in his way."

"I am sorry you have such a debased view of young girls."

"Young girls have themselves to thank for it. I would not be surprised if that police boy will be calling to see you just the same, though you are unchaperoned, and you will let him, and enjoy the liberty!"

"I shall not be giving parties, of course, or holding orgies," said Edwina, with a smile, "but if Billie or any of my friends drop in on the way to tennis for a cup of tea, I shall be glad to see them. Who could object to that?"

"You have to think of the world."

"Does the 'world', which is represented by a few mischievous gossips, imagine that respectable men and women cannot conduct themselves with self-respect when someone is not by to be a check on their evil tendencies? Oh, well, you can tell people that I have an *ayah*, and that I'll remember to keep the drawing-room door wide."

"You are most insolent! I see no sense in prolonging the conversation." Mrs. Hope hurried away with her head in the air, and Edwina returned home, full of laughter.

CHAPTER XV

A NEW EFFORT

EDWINA had seen so little of Captain Dysart since the night he escorted her home from the concert, that she began to believe she had at last been successful in discouraging his advances towards friendship. However, woman-like, she was disappointed, for she would have enjoyed a few more opportunities of fencing with him and teaching him that there was, at least, one girl in Rajpahar who was impervious to his fascinations. She often wondered how he was amusing himself, or if he had found someone else with whom to flirt, and was well content to leave the priggish Edwina Hope alone.

Was she a prig?

A prig was someone who closely resembled a Pharisee. Though such a person did not thank God that he was not as other men are, he was very smug and self-satisfied.

Edwina decided that she could not be a prig, for she was not at all satisfied with herself, and always distrusted her judgments. For instance, what right had she to refuse, so persistently, to forgive Captain Dysart for his misconduct when he had expressed contrition? She had wanted so much to forgive him, that she had mistrusted her human impulse, and pride had made her feel that to relent was weakness. It was not being priggish to dislike

men of loose morals, but a sense of fastidiousness and a desire to preserve her ideals. She had found in her life that it was only too easy to lower one's cherished standards. Her nature being naturally sympathetic, she was always inclined to make allowances for people.

She had made many allowances for Mrs. Bainbridge, but none for the man who would deliberately have betrayed her. However, if he were really penitent and anxious to retrieve his past, it was her duty to encourage his effort, not despise and doubt it.

Billie Hutchins was a useful companion in more ways than one. It was easy to learn from him all she wanted to know, by just letting him talk. Boy-like, he was a purveyor of news, and was often very entertaining. Edwina was very fond of him for his direct simplicity and clean outlook on life. He had no mind for subtleties and a great ingenuousness, which made him ready to credit everyone with good intentions unless discovered vile. He had always secretly admired Captain Dysart, till he thought he was acting wrongly by Mrs. Bainbridge, when his disgust made him willing to believe the worst. However, Edwina had proved to his satisfaction that they had both greatly exaggerated the state of the case, which was justified when Mrs. Bainbridge and Captain Dysart ceased to be friendly. He argued to himself that the two had come to their senses and had agreed to cut out all intimacy. He had thoroughly approved, and from that moment could not admire his hero enough.

It was from him she heard, at last, that Jack Dysart, of whom no one had any information, had been out of the station, spending a week with a planter. It seemed that he had just returned and was now engaged in exercising the horse he was to ride in the races, and in playing polo

at the cantonments. As he was rarely to be seen at tea-parties or escorting fair ladies to evening entertainments, he was the most discussed being of anyone in the station. Never had there been so much curiosity evinced about any young man in Rajpahar society.

"What has made him so suddenly elusive?" Edwina asked Billie.

"I don't know. It is only the serious side of his character come to the fore, which he has not thought of showing us hitherto. He's fed up with women, I suppose. Seen too much of them and is turning a mysogonist."

"Perhaps it suits him just now to create a sensation by keeping to himself for a bit. No one knows better than he how greatly he is being missed, and he is quite enjoying the fuss."

"You are wrong," said Billie, proud of his superior knowledge on the subject. "He's really tired of it all—the flippancies and frivolities, the back-biting and slandering; the way women make themselves cheap. He once told me, not long ago, that he would have cut the station long ago, but for a special object he has in view. I believe it has to do with the races, for he is as keen as knives to win."

Edwina wondered concerning the object Captain Dysart had in view, but turned the conversation into other channels. She accompanied Billie to tennis, or rode with one or another of the boys, during the following week, but never came across Jack Dysart.

Shortly afterwards, when he suddenly appeared at the Club, Edwina was ashamed of her sex for the ovation the ladies gave him. It angered her to think how greatly he was flattered by their eagerness to claim his attention. Married women, Mrs. Cavil conspicuous among them, coquetted openly with him, and he was burdened with

invitations for which he had no use, judging from the wild excuses he gave as he refused them all.

Edwina herself turned her back on him after the slightest of bows, and interested herself in a card trick one of the boys was showing her. Someone suggested dancing, and she left the room a moment later, with Captain Dysart still the centre of an admiring circle, and tried to forget his existence—tried, but did not succeed. All the while she was conscious of the strangest of all miracles, for the very atmosphere of the Club had changed with his coming. There was wine in the very air, the very lights were brighter, and her feet were inspired.

She was angry with herself for her inability to shut him out of her mind, and for the thrills of excitement pervading her whole being from the moment of his arrival. All women were fools, and she the greatest one of all, she told herself, for allowing him to affect her in this way—she, who knew so well his insincerity, and how little reliance could be placed on his reformation! Nevertheless, her heart beat as every footfall behind her suggested him. Any figure in the doorway, as people came and went, made her weak with anticipation.

When he came with Billie and leaned against a door to watch the dancing, she could dance no more, but suffered her partner to lead her through another door to the sitting-room, where she could school her nerves and bring them under control. What was the matter with her? she wanted to know, for it was not as if she could ever be in love with such a man as Captain Dysart! It was sheer hypnotism—or some psychic influence she could not explain. It frightened her till her natural courage came to her rescue and she was ready to face the ordeal of conversation with Captain Dysart.

But Mrs. Cavil was not going to allow him to escape from herself. Edwina saw her, a while later, pacing the long, glazed veranda with him, talking to him with great earnestness.

While listening to the conversation about her and an argument between Billie and one of his pals, she could not help her eyes straying to the veranda where Captain Dysart was looking terribly bored as he paced the floor with the lady.

Suddenly their eyes met, and he seemed to forget his manners, for he left Mrs. Cavil without apology and came over to Edwina as if in answer to a summons. In that moment, her companions melted away—even Billie, whose friend had offered him a drink, so that in the midst of a full gathering of members they two were alone.

"Good evening," said Dysart, taking the seat beside her. "I did not intend to speak to you to-night, only to look at you and go, but, as you see, my resolutions are as weak as water where you are concerned."

"Why do you think it necessary to say all this to me?" she asked him disdainfully. "Keep that sort of flattery for your very particular friends. I am only a stranger."

"Why do you use that tone so persistently to me?" (reproachfully).

"Because I dislike you—when you are insincere."

"It happens that I am more in earnest than I've been in my life. But I shall not try to convince you. I hear you are quite alone at the villa?"

"And enjoying it exceedingly," she replied.

"Have you good news from the Bainbridges?"

"Excellent. They are enjoying their holiday very much."

"Why may I not come and cheer you in your loneliness? Is it forbidden?"

"Yes."

"By whom?"

"Myself."

"Still determined to believe me a hopeless rascal?" he asked.

"As a matter of fact, I haven't given the subject a thought."

"I suggest that you are not being sincere with yourself, or me. You have decided to be just a little kinder to me, as kindness does a power of good. I must endeavour to explain. Do you believe in telepathy? I do. You were thinking, only this evening, that if Jack Dysart came down to the Club, you would relent just a little bit towards him, if for no reason than to show him that your nature is all tender and womanly behind the wall of pride and intolerance that has camouflaged your real self so long. It has struck you that bad men have all got a soft spot somewhere, though reached with tact and sympathy it might make all the difference in the world to their characters, so you are prepared to be sympathetic. Your feeling came to me out of a clear sky, and I dropped everything to answer the call. Now tell me if I am wrong."

Edwina could not help the colour rising to her cheeks, and for a moment it was impossible to meet Captain Dysart's eyes. How could he have known that she was thinking in that very strain, every day?—and more especially that afternoon? Was it a case of thought transference or—or was it guess-work and bluff? She never knew what to think of such a man—like no other she had met in her life! Again her pride and a lurking sense of humour came to her rescue——

"I have no missionary instincts, but if I can be of any use in the work of regeneration, you may command me;

but you must not flatter yourself that I sent you any Marconigrams." Her laughter was delightful to hear.

"I am content. What about a ride to-morrow, if the weather permits? I can find you a mount."

Why shouldn't she ride with Captain Dysart? There was very little sense in snubbing him eternally. Such a simple thing as a ride together meant nothing. New acquaintances rode together. But she did not wish to be indebted to him for a mount.

"Shall we?—I think I should like it very much, thank you. But don't trouble to find a mount. There is a horse available I usually ride, and like quite well, so it will be all right."

"As you please," said he, only too glad to have won her consent. "Where shall we go?"

"Anywhere you like."

"Have you ever been to Singaling?" he asked her.

"No—but I know of the caves there. A place for picnics. It won't be a bad idea if we make up a party" (mischievously).

"Not on your life! I loathe parties," said he, vigorously. "I have been avoiding parties like sin the past few weeks. Please don't spoil my first outing with you by suggesting a crowd!"

"Not even a *couple*?" she teased. "There's Billie Hutchins, such a dear! and it wouldn't be difficult to find a girl—perhaps Mrs. Cavil?"

He turned and looked full at her with searching gaze.

"What do you know about Mrs. Cavil, that you name her?"

Edwina blushed, sorry she spoke. "Nothing at all. Only I fancied she would like being asked to join us."

"Look here," said he, with determination, "I don't

generally talk against women, but I want to be sure that you will not make a friend of her. Promise."

"There is no fear of that. She dislikes me too much."

"Give her a wide berth. That's all. So it's settled we go to the caves—it's a long ride—but if you won't tire, I shall enjoy it. I'll take a hamper of sorts, for you'll miss luncheon, and there are no hotels within miles of Singaling."

"When shall we start?" she inquired.

"I'll call for you at eleven. I do wish you would let me bring you a gee. I know one that would suit you to perfection."

But Edwina refused, determined not to be obligated to him for anything. "I'll manage quite well, thank you."

"Have your way," said he, smiling at her in reproof. "Of all the obstinate girls I have known—!" He seemed to enjoy looking at her, for his eyes strayed again and again to her face, to Edwina's acute embarrassment. "What can I get you to drink?" he asked, politely.

"Water, please, I am dying of thirst."

"No one drinks water here. You would be very ill if you did. Suggest something less unobtainable."

"Don't talk nonsense!" She laughed. "What do the children drink?"

"Ask me another. Let me bring you some wine?—a cocktail?"

"Only water, please."

"What extraordinary taste! You must be an American. Iced water! Ye gods!" He looked about him in mock helplessness till, catching sight of Billie, he beckoned to him. "Here is a young lady who has a preference for iced water. Do you know if such a thing is to be had?"

"Want a drink of water, Wina?" cried Billie eagerly,

having no sense of humour. "I'll fetch you a soda." He was away in a moment and Captain Dysart sighed heavily, glad not to lose his seat.

"Do they all call you 'Wina'?" he asked, resentfully.

"All who are my special pals. I much prefer it to 'Miss Hope'."

"I agree, Wina. 'Miss' is so formal."

"I did not give you permission to be informal, Captain Dysart."

"I was christened 'John Wentworth', but my friends call me 'Jack'," he murmured.

"So I believe."

"Couldn't you call me Jack? It is so homely and rhymes with unromantic things like 'quack', and 'lack'."

"The last with reference to qualities you do not possess!"

He laughed so heartily that many eyes turned in his direction, and women whispered among themselves when it was observed who was his companion. The girl was actually making the blasé fellow *laugh*!

Edwina did not consent to the use of her Christian name, and refused to call Dysart by his; nor was he allowed to see her home, for Billie was her accepted escort.

On her way home, she called with Billie at the livery stables, only to learn that all the best ponies, including her favourite, were bespoken for the morrow, and that she would have to take what she could get. There was a chestnut Bhutan mare—the owner volunteered hesitatingly—not used to the side saddle, but the stable boy would ride it with a blanket, and if it did not object she would be sure it was all right. It was as sure-footed as a hill goat, and its action was like an arm-chair.

"I don't trust the fellow," said Billie. "He is keeping something back. There is a fly in the ointment somewhere."

"I am not afraid. I have ridden ponies that shy and play pranks. In fact, they are far more exciting," said Edwina.

"I hope it hasn't a hard mouth. Some of these hill ponies run away at a walk, and you can't make any impression on their mouths. I wish you had consented to Dysart's proposal."

"That is just what I did not want to do. I hate to be under any obligation to him."

"Then why have consented to ride?"

"Because I did not wish to snub him all the time."

The chestnut pony was ordered for the morning, and Edwina went home, feeling thrilled with anticipation. A leap of her heart greeted the thought of the morning and the excursion to Singaling with Captain Dysart. It was absurd, considering he was less than nothing to her. A short time ago she would have scouted the idea of consenting to ride with Jack Dysart, but time did strange things for people, apart from healing wounds.

CHAPTER XVI

THE EXCURSION

THE following morning the weather was so disappointing that Edwina was afraid that it was going to interfere with the outing. She watched the lowering clouds much as a child the gathering storm which threatens to deprive it of a party. Heavy clouds drifted across the face of the sun, and the mountains surrounding the spur on which the station was perched looked darkly purple and aggressive, while rain-storms swept the distant landscape, obliterating the view.

The peaks of Everlasting Snow, when not obscured, looked isolated in the heavens, banks of clouds screening their majestic proportions. Never had the Himalaya mountains looked so dark and so forbidding, their ruggedness so inaccessible. Naked, or heavily clothed in verdure, they rose skyward in monumental grandeur, the most imposing spectacle in the world.

Edwina gazed out on the scene, breathing in the sweet purity of the moisture-laden air, sure that nowhere could mountains be finer. In contrast to Nature's dignity were the puny habitations of humanity, perched on the slopes and in the valleys, their red roofs making spots of colour amidst the green. Everywhere ran roads like white ribbons twisting in all directions, intersecting each other and disappearing into the dark forests.

She found Captain Dysart an optimist with regard to it, despite the falling of the barometer. There were rest-houses and sheds on the way to Singaling, so what was there to fear? As there was not much of a wind, there was nothing to worry about, and as the rain was seasonable, she could not catch cold.

Edwina, therefore, set forth cheerfully, bent upon curbing the high spirits of her pony.

"I hope it is not too far!" she said, after a few minutes' canter. Already her hands were feeling blistered and numb, holding in the excited animal, which wanted to gallop at every provocation.

"Two hours slow going, both ways," answered Dysart. "That brute is tiring you. I wish you had let me bring you the mount I had in mind."

Edwina was wishing she had, for more of this sort of thing would paralyse her fingers and strain her wrists. "I asked," she explained, determined not to confess herself beaten, "because I want to be home before nightfall."

"That will be easy enough. Only I am worried to see you so harassed by that pony. I'd change gees, only mine has never carried a lady, and it might be going from the frying pan into the fire."

Presently, the gusts of wind round corners threatened to be an annoyance, especially as it brought with it occasionally a Scotch mist. Nevertheless, they pressed gaily on, as it was a case of "Never say die". It added to the excitement of the adventure to have something to battle against, if only the Bhutan pony would behave itself!

"In his earlier state he must have been a crab," shouted Edwina, to be heard above the wind.

"Look here—I've a good mind to tie a *bagdore** to the bit

*Leading rope.

and stop all that pulling. A restraining lead is useful in a case like this."

"I think we had better not stop to experiment. I would rather stop when we come to a rest-house."

"We have already passed two. They are well back from the road on the hillside, so you missed seeing them. Are you getting wet?"

"Not through my mac'," she returned.

They ambled along side by side, while the width of the road permitted it, and in Indian file where it was narrow. Edwina would have preferred to canter, but feared giving her pony his head lest it should bolt.

"He's pulling my hands off!" she cried, coming to the end of her tether.

He might have said, "Serve you right for your obstinacy," but looked, instead, intensely concerned. "You had better let us swop nags. Nothing can be worse than all that pulling. Hill ponies are generally hard-mouthed, and you cannot hold them if they bolt."

"Why don't you scold me. I deserve it."

"I never hit a man when he is down!"

"If it isn't much further, I'll try to hold out. Too much trouble to change here. I don't mind on the way back."

So they rode on for some time trying to make conversation in the now riotous wind.

"It isn't turning out quite what one would call a propitious day!" she called at the top of her voice.

"No!" he bawled. "I shouldn't have let you come, but it did not look so bad when we started."

"Besides, I hate to be disappointed!" came her answer.

"So do I. I hadn't the patience for a postponement."

"Don't worry," she cried sportingly, "I am enjoying it all the same."

A few minutes later, a rush of gravel from above, dislodged by a hill goat, rattled on to the road behind Edwina's pony and put the finishing touch to its excitement. Already a mass of nerves, it reared and then plunged, after which, taking the bit between its teeth, it broke into a frightened gallop. It turned the corners at high speed, its hoofs clattering on the rocky roadway, completely out of control.

Edwina realized what had happened and tried to keep her wits, though panic seized her heart. She could not tell at what moment the mad creature might not leap the low parapet at the edge of the road and plunge into space. In places, the precipices were a thousand feet in depth, and everywhere such a fall would mean certain death.

The road continued to rise at a slow gradient, up and up, and round about, on its way to the caves at Singaling, so much she knew, but she blanched at the hair-breadth escapes she had against projecting boulders, or of being flung headlong, horse and all, down some dark ravine which seemed to yawn beneath her as she swayed in the saddle and hauled with all her might at the reins.

"Oh, my God!" she gasped, every time they just missed the edge of a precipice or clattered thunderously over some old bridge that spanned a hill torrent. Once she caught sight of a hill coolie gaping after her with open mouth as she sped past, horror in his eyes, as if he knew she was going to her death. She began to believe that the sure end of that mad race was death, as her breath failed, coming hard in spasms, and her fingers no longer felt the slipping reins.

Still the powerful brute pounded on, caring nothing where it was going to, and totally lost to any instinct of

self-preservation, as is often the case once a horse is panic-stricken.

She was glad whenever the road widened, for she contemplated letting herself fall off the moment she judged the ground would allow of such a feat. She might be killed or injured, but she knew that sooner or later whatever happened to her, she would have to let go. With that object in view, she slipped her foot half-out of the stirrup, gripping with her knees and watching when and where to choose her fall. But the ground sped so rapidly by, that she no sooner judged it time to drop when she found she was either skirting a precipice or dashing over a bridge.

Gradually she felt her senses forsaking her. All thought of her companion fled from her mind. She was face to face with death and beginning to feel that the sooner it came to her, the better. Once she was sure she heard the beat of horse's hoofs close behind her, but thought it could only be her imagination, as no two horses could race together on those ledges called roads.

Suddenly, in a place where the road widened, her pony was forced to swerve to the wall of the hillside, to make way for another horse that had caught up with it and was coming abreast. Through the mists of exhaustion, Edwina saw Captain Dysart straining towards her, and leaning to meet him, she was swept from her saddle and transferred to his arms.

It had happened in a moment, and that moment chosen by Dysart with unerring judgment with a brain that knew nothing of personal fear.

The runaway pony clattered on, riderless, while Edwina, who had fainted, was safe, held securely to Dysart's breast, as he reined in his horse and brought it to a standstill.

She recovered a moment later to find herself on the ground, Captain Dysart holding a flask of brandy to her lips. When she was able to sit up, she saw his horse grazing on grass which grew by the wayside, while a gathering mist seemed to be advancing to them from the valley below. Her rescuer, full of solicitude for her, made her rest awhile. She was too spent and weak to stand, whatever the consequences to them both from mist and rain. Neither spoke much for some time, for both were suffering from exhaustion and shock.

"I could kick myself for bringing this upon you," said he, full of pity for her. "It was a touch and go!"

"I am entirely to blame," said she. "I should have borrowed the mount you offered me. How thankful I am for the miraculous escape, which I owe to you!"

He smiled with extraordinary sweetness.

CHAPTER XVII

THE CAVES

THEY rested for some time against the hill and slowly recovered their energy and mental equilibrium, both trying, in British fashion, to make light of the effect the shock had had on them both. They saw the rain increasing, the clouds descending, but neither moved to look for shelter. All about them were giant mountains wrapped in a veil of mist, driven by the wind, and they heard low mutterings of thunder.

"That was a real 'Douglas Fairbanks' stunt, Captain Dysart!" said Edwina, still breathless. "How did you do it?"

"Military tournaments teach one to do many tricks on horseback," said he, mopping his face, his hands quivering visibly. "God!—that was a near thing for you, little girl! At one time I feared I'd not do it, in which case we should both have gone to 'kingdom come' together. The space was so narrow, we could not ride abreast—then, at last, came this wide strip, and"—he heaved a sigh of satisfaction without finishing his sentence.

"But—would you have gone over with me? Oh, how terrible for you!"

"I shouldn't have wanted to live—perhaps you think I am lying?"

"There was no need to risk your life," she murmured.

"Do you think I would have returned without you?"

She was silent, for the intensity of his gaze carried conviction. That was his nature, she told herself. Reckless and dare-devil. Life and death were as nothing to him!

For a time, nothing more was said, while the rain began to run off their waterproof capes and make pools at their feet.

"Do you know where we are?" he asked her.

"No. I have never been in this direction before."

"Look over there—" he pointed through the mist to a rugged mountain close at hand with the road winding along it. A gap in the fog made its rocky sides visible where it was honey-combed with dark cavities. "The caves. We have practically arrived. The brute brought you by chance on the right road. Had he branched off on another which has not been completed, by now you would have been a mangled corpse at the bottom of the Lungfoo ravine."

Edwina shuddered. "We should both have been there—if you had followed me! — would you, *really*?" She wanted to believe it.

"Why ask me if you have any doubt?" was his quiet reply. "Shall we hurry? It looks as if we are in for a bad storm. Did you hear the thunder, and the clouds are very low."

They rose, and he gathered his horse's reins to lead the way. "If you don't feel like walking the little way, sit on my horse and I'll hold you."

"I shall walk quite well," said she, following his lead. She felt very puny and unworthy as she walked beside the heroic fellow who was all things that were bad and yet

ad the heart of a lion to achieve and dare. Somehow,)ysart's manhood triumphed over all her preconceived otions of him, and she was able to regard him from another ngle. But at the moment she was too weary and shaken or analysis of any kind, and dragged her aching limbs long, wondering how it would be possible to return to the tation, now that she had lost her mount! No one else as likely to be out on such a bad day, so that they would e altogether deprived of assistance to reach home. The istance was terrific and quite beyond her strength to achieve n foot. But even the consideration of their return as too much for her weariness.

In silence they walked to the caves, Captain Dysart eady to help her in difficult places, for as they approached heir destination the road grew steep and uneven, the rocks nd gravel rough under foot.

She looked up at him under the brim of her hat, full of new adoration of his strength and courage. Whatever e might be, he was greatly to be admired for these. With ne other episode fresh in mind—when he had saved the ainbridge baby—and now this wonderful feat of daring, he was almost rendered voiceless from the lump in her hroat. To her, he towered above all other men, an utstanding figure—a real hero.

He was a born soldier. Men like him had made England ictorious in the War. One day she would listen to others ell of the countless deeds of heroism accomplished by im in the trenches of France. Something must have gone rong in his life to have made him so callous to suffering nd devoid of morality—a thousand pities, for she believed hat, in love, he might have been equally wonderful! omeone had shattered his ideals and lowered his opinion f women, or why was he the heartless *roué* the world

called him?—the unscrupulous lover she had proved him?

Yet, his personality was magnetic. She felt it whenever he was in her neighbourhood, for it drew her to think of him and observe him. Even now while she ascended to the caves by his side, her hand locked in his as he helped her up the rugged path, she was concious of turmoil within her.

She had once dreamed of him——

The memory of that dream was devastating to her mental poise.

Whatever happened, she must admit that she was now everlastingly in his debt. Therefore she would have to be kind—she would have to be *friends*.

Dysart half-lifted her into a cavern on the hillside, his horse scrambling after them, and she dropped upon a pile of straw which some picnic party had conveniently left behind them. Captain Dysart relieved her of her mackintosh and wet shoes. His care of her was wonderful, and she enjoyed his ministrations, his concern, because her hands were cold and she was shivering.

"It is only nerves," she explained. "Don't worry."

"I am so afraid you have taken a chill!" he cried, anxious eyes searching her for some reassurance that his fears were groundless. "I was mad to have brought you out to-day—and we are not at the end of the bad weather, by any means!"

"Don't be a pessimist," she smiled.

"You are splendid!" he exclaimed, after a moment spent in admiring her with his eyes. "How many girls in your place would have been so philosophical? I should have had to tackle hysterics and a flood of reproaches!"

"But why should I reproach you, when I am equally to blame for braving the weather?"

"I should have known better what to expect at this time of the year. Are you hungry? Perhaps some food will make you feel better. See what I have brought." He produced sandwiches of various descriptions, cakes and coffee.

It pleased him greatly to hear that Edwina was hungry, and together they enjoyed a hearty lunch.

"You have brought enough for two days," said Edwina, laughing at his notion of a lunch for two.

"I am now glad I erred on the side of plenty," said he, "for it is possible that you and I might be marooned here till someone thinks of coming to fetch us."

"You *are* a pessimist! Can't we take it in turn to ride back on your horse?"

"No, for my poor gee is lame. He might be better by to-morrow, but at this moment he couldn't walk any distance, much less carry anyone. He's strained a sinew on those rocky roads."

Captain Dysart went over to his horse and examined the limb sympathetically. "I'll take him down to the *khora* for a drink of water, and we'll see how he goes." He left Edwina to rest on the straw while he led the horse out into the rain and in the direction of a waterfall which could be heard thundering on its tumultuous course to the plains. By the time he returned, half an hour later, Edwina could see that the poor beast was limping badly and in evident pain. There was a swelling above the fetlock and Captain Dysart tore his handkerchief into strips and bandaged the strained muscles.

"That puts the lid on any chance of getting back to-night," said he, when he had attended to the comfort

of the horse. "I am sorry I did not bring a *sais* with me, for we might have sent him to the nearest village for help. At least a coolie might have been induced to run to Rajpahar to bring us assistance. The worst of it is, I don't know in which direction to find a village in all this mist."

"And I couldn't contemplate being left here all alone!" she hastened to add. "Suppose a bear appeared from inside there—ugh!" she shuddered, indicating the interior of the cave which seemed to vanish in gloomy catacombs.

"There is no fear of that," said he. "There are no bears anywhere here, for these caves are too often full of picnic parties, and, as a matter of fact, hunters have driven wild beasts away. That is why we have now to go such distances when we're after bears."

"What are we to do?" she asked, anxiously.

"It needs some thinking about, but don't be distressed, for the rain might clear and give us a chance of looking about us. Moreover, anyone might turn up—let us hope a hillman or two—and save us having to spend the night up here." He thought it possible that villagers could provide some sort of conveyance for her and he would walk. After a rest they would both feel more inclined to tackle the knotty question of the return journey. In any case it would be a very slow return, for the horse was dead lame.

Edwina wondered what could have happened to the Bhutan pony, and Dysart believed that it had either killed itself or grown thoroughly tired, and was now in the possession of hillmen camping in the mountains or in a homestead by the way.

"It will be dreadful if I can't get back to-night," said Edwina.

"Are you afraid of trusting yourself to the care of a 'bad man' or are you thinking of station gossips?"

"I am thinking of the Bainbridge baby," said she. "I am responsible for his welfare and it troubles me to be away from home." She did not tell him that her adventurous spirit glowed at the thought of being cut off from the station, with Captain Dysart for her companion, and the two of them isolated in the caves of Singaling! She could well imagine the malignant things that would be said. She would be without a shred of character for the rest of her days! But the prospect did not frighten her, for she was beginning to feel very much at home with the "bad man", and realizing that his instincts were just as chivalrous when he respected a woman as any good man's. She was confident that she was perfectly safe in his care, so that the adventure had its appeal, but for the fact that duty made it imperative she should sleep at the villa.

They talked together of the scare her absence would create. In a little while after nightfall, there would be S.O.S. signals broadcast by the *ayah*. Edwina could see the servants running about the station to ask if the Miss Sahib had been seen; and when the night passed without news, the police would be out on the job. Some would be sure to think that there had been an elopement, said Captain Dysart.

"Not anybody!" Edwina laughed. "They know we are little more than strangers. Besides, I couldn't elope without luggage!"

"That's reasonable!"

"Billie will know that we rode to the caves, for I told him of our intention. He will think there has been an

accident, and will come out after me with a search party. The earliest will be to-morrow morning."

"If the weather permits," said Dysart, looking out upon a fresh cloudburst and a stormy sky. "What poisonous luck!"

"Billie would come in any weather to look for me."

"So he would. Billie is a good fellow. He wants to marry you, Wina."

"Did he tell you so?" deciding not to mind his use of her name.

"He tells everybody, as he aches for sympathy. I am glad you are not going to marry Billie Hutchins."

"Why, pray?"

"I should hope your ambition would make you rise above such a commonplace name. 'Mrs. Hutchins!' I try to imagine it of you, and cannot. No. We'll cut that out."

"What's in a name? I'd marry a 'Smith' or 'Jones' if I loved him."

"I believe you would." He forgot to remove his eyes from her face till she looked up at him in embarrassment, when he rose and stood at the entrance of the cave looking out on the pitiless weather.

"Who would have thought it was going to turn out as badly as this? *Damnation!*" he muttered.

Instead of showing signs of improving, it was getting worse. It was one of those stormy days, typical of monsoon weather, when the clouds seem to descend on earth and mingle with the mountains, wrapping all in intermittent gloom and fog, with driving rain of a torrential sort, and furious gusts of wind in which it was difficult to stand upright.

Edwina lay back on the straw, watching Dysart rather

than the storm, for she was, at last, admitting to herself that she admired his looks exceedingly. It was small wonder that Pearle Bainbridge had fallen in love with him when he paid her attentions. All in a moment, she recalled the tableau on the hillside before she had learned to know the Bainbridges, and was hot with shame. They had never spoken of it, and might never speak of it as long as they lived, but the picture was unforgettable. Poor Pearle Bainbridge had suffered because of him, as any girl would suffer who allowed Captain Dysart to play at love with her. Love was a great game with such men, who would play it to the end of the chapter, so long as they could charm, and women were free.

To entertain themselves, Edwina and her companion tried to explore the recesses of the cavern in which they had taken refuge, as innumerable subterranean passages were said to connect all the caves on that hillside, but the darkness was impenetrable and there was always the possibility of being lost, even if Captain Dysart had been able to spare matches.

Eventually, they returned to the pile of straw, Edwina having relented so far as to call her companion "Jack".

It was when the afternoon waned and the shades of evening began to darken the landscape and turn the cave into a damp and gloomy dungeon, that Edwina could not refuse to admit her nervousness.

She was not afraid of darkness, but the entire circumstances cast strange terrors into her soul. She looked at the man beside her who was so tender towards her and careful of her comfort as far as lay in his power, and the old distrust crept back. What guarantee had she that she could trust him all alone in the darkness of a night spent so far from people? He was not a good man, as goodness

is counted, and he was owing her a grudge for her treatment of him on that memorable occasion when they had crossed swords and she had won.

Yet it was inevitable that they must spend that night in the cave together.

Somehow, his charm had melted her aloofness and they were now friends. "Wina" and "Jack". How had it come to pass?

She noticed a softness in his eyes when he addressed her. His voice sounded tender, his manner was considerate. Their companionship had made great strides towards intimacy, and with the coming of the darkness she wished with all her heart that she had preserved the old distance and disdain. With the new order of things came self-consciousness and strange stirrings within her, unrest, and yearnings.

Yet, it would have been difficult to have remained cold and aloof after he had saved her life.

Dysart seemed chiefly troubled for her ease and well-being. There were some sandwiches left, and he had brandy in his flask. For a bed, there was only the straw. She might be cold. . . .

He returned with the horse's blanket. If she did not mind, at least it would keep her warm.

"Don't worry for me. I won't sleep—I can't imagine sleeping in a place like this," she replied, aware that already her eyes were heavy with sleep. With the gathering darkness, sleep seemed the only means of escape from distressing conditions. Yet how was it possible to encourage it in such peculiar circumstances?

When no longer able to bear the pangs of hunger, she allowed Captain Dysart to open the bag of provisions, and give her food. By that time, it was almost too dark

to see if he was also eating. The horse had been fed on the gram he had brought in a nose-bag, and once more led to the waterfall for a drink, so that Dysart had nothing to do but keep her entertained and easy in mind. They laughed and talked in a light vein, both determined to keep their spirits up.

"It has been a very unfortunate outing," said he. "I shall be blamed by everyone for it, and perhaps you will, in the end, turn against me. That would be the last straw. Whatever happens, will you promise that you will not think that I have deliberately got you into this fix!"

She reassured him, laughing bravely. "What does it matter what is said? I know, and you know, how it all came about. It simply could not have been helped."

"And all we can do is to make the best of it," said he. "You are splendid—a real pal, Wina. I understand how Billie feels about you, and sympathize. There is nothing in life a fellow wants more than a pal in the girl he—loves. Poor devil! Presently, it will be as dark as pitch, do you realize that? No stars—nothing! You will not see your hand before your face. How's that?"

"I don't mind," said Edwina with a suspicious quaver in her voice. "Of course, it will be disagreeable, and I hope I shan't get a fright. What about snakes?"

"None within miles of the place."

"That's good. Let us talk all night."

"You'll be too tired. Listen to the rain!"

It was coming down in sheets, and as the spray found its way to them, they retired further in, Captain Dysart lighting matches to show the way. He spread the straw so that Edwina could recline on it, covered by the horse's blanket.

"It smells of the stable," she complained.

"Never mind, it will keep you warm," said he, peremptorily.

"But you? You will be cold!"

"It won't be the first time. In France, during the War, I used to be frozen stiff, and, by rights, should have died after standing in water in the trenches for days. So don't trouble about me. I can rough it when you can't. I will never forget how *you* once tried to, out of loyalty to a friend, and caught pneumonia."

"Never speak of that night again, if we are to be friends," said she. "I want to forget it, and believe you are not the same man."

"You may believe that. It's the truth, God knows."

Silence fell between them, and Edwina felt herself nodding with sleep and fatigue. "Please talk to me; tell me about France during the War and all you can, for I don't want to sleep," said she.

"Very well." And he told her many stories, while the storm raged on the hillside and the rain descended in torrents. He tuned his voice almost to a monotone, knowing that it would lull her into unconsciousness, and when her breathing grew regular he ceased speaking and took out his cigarette case. Picking out a cigarette, he placed it between his lips and struck a match. He then lighted his cigarette and, before throwing the match away, looked down at the sleeper beside him.

He saw a face of exceeding sweetness in complete repose, framed in a setting of bronze hair; dark lashes resting on cheeks tinted like a wild rose, a somewhat insignificant but lovable little nose, and lips tenderly curved and parted on a gleam of white, even teeth.

He knew the features by heart, the curves and dimples, for he had studied them all day; still he looked again

till the match burnt out, and with a long-drawn breath, he lay back on the same straw, his head cradled in his hands. With eyes wide in the darkness, he was thinking deeply—thinking sadly, for life played strange tricks with a man sometimes, the strangest of all being when it showed him too late what might have been, but for mistakes that were irretrievable.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MISHAP

IT was the strangest experience of Edwina's life to be aware all night, betwixt sleeping and waking, that she was sharing her rough couch with Captain Dysart. That it should be he, of all men—the one whom she had believed was the most vicious of any she had met! If he was that, she was not allowed to be conscious of it, but treated only to chivalry and kindness. She could hear his even breathing in the darkness and could touch him if she ventured to do so. Once, hearing queer sounds in the cave, she had reached forth a hand and made sure that the quiet breathing was his and not that of some strange prowling creature. The feel of his coat-sleeve was instantly comforting. When the sound was repeated, she called his name in a startled whisper, and he awoke immediately.

"I feel horribly nervous. What is that noise? Listen!"

Shuffling sounds that made her blood creep, then a sneeze, and Captain Dysart burst out laughing. "It's only my gee. He's rubbing his sides against the rocky wall. Poor devil!—I hope he won't take cold."

"I am so sorry I disturbed you, but every sound in this black darkness gives me shivers."

"You did not disturb me, I was wide awake."

"Oh, no, you were not. I could tell by your breathing you were sound."

"Perhaps you would like to tell me that I snored?" (Reproachfully.)

"No," she gurgled with laughter, "not as bad as that. But you were sleeping. I am so glad, for you were as tired as myself."

"I must have dropped off for a few minutes," he allowed.

"Do you think that the storm will clear in the morning?"

"It is pretty sure to," said he, comfortingly. "Are you warm?"

"Fairly."

"Give me your hand, and I'll know how cold you are."

After a little groping his hand found hers and he exclaimed aloud: "You are quite chilled. You must take my coat——"

"I shall not!"

"You must! My mac. will keep me cosy."

"I absolutely refuse!"

But Dysart would not listen to her.

"You'll just do as you are told. Come—no fuss!" Almost sternly, he forced her to slip her arms into the armholes and tucked the sides about her.

"I shall be miserable thinking of you without your coat, and for *my* sake," she protested.

"Don't trouble about me, but go to sleep," said he, gruffly. "The only other thing I could have suggested was to take you into my arms and give you some of my warmth, but to that you would not have consented."

"I am afraid not!" said Edwina, wishing with all her heart that he would take her, now. For a while she lay trembling at the very thought of being held close in his arms, and thrilled with imagination, already warmed to the very core.

She scarcely knew herself, and blushed in the darkness

to think that she should even consider such an intimacy. How was she changing so? What had happened to her? Why should the loneliness of those regions, the storm and the darkness, make her so conscious of the man at her side, and cause the very air to throb, her heart to beat in her throat?

She was in love with Jack Dysart, like scores of other women, and as unable to resist him as the rest! That was the truth of it, and if he guessed it he would score another success! Wonderful as he was—brave, devil-may-care, compelling—he was past-master at making women adore him, and should not be allowed to count her among his victims. His very chivalry and tenderness were part of his stock-in-trade, and she must not be too ready to believe in him, no matter how convincing was his good behaviour.

Edwina closed her eyes and wooed sleep which eluded her for some time. Long before she lost consciousness, Dysart was slumbering—this time, in deathly silence. Not a movement, not a sound.

So calmness was restored; her pulses returned to normal, and she, too, was able to forget everything in dreamless sleep.

When next she awoke, it was dawn with unchanged conditions. Though the mists had cleared and the clouds were higher, it was still raining heavily and blowing a gale.

They were, indeed, paying for their folly in having taken a chance on weather conditions, and all for the excitement of a ride together! Not only was she absent from her trust, but earning the severest censure of the community. People who had little or no opinion of Captain Dysart's morals would not give them the benefit of doubts, but damn her good name for ever. It would be enough for them

that he had taken her away and passed the night in her company in the Singaling caves!

Edwina coloured hotly with shame and indignation, yet how could she expect otherwise? The world was censorious and she had braved conventions too far, although unwittingly. She could imagine her stepmother's face when she heard the news. She could sense the acrimony of the ladies of Rajpahar. In their jealousy nothing would be too bad for them to say of her. For all her dislike of conventions, Edwina shivered a little to think of how she had placed herself at the mercy of her enemies! It was going to be intolerably humiliating if people misjudged the situation and interpreted the misadventure in an evil light!

Captain Dysart still slept soundly, turned away from her as though altogether forgetful of her existence! The pale light of dawn enabled her to see his shape dimly, and she fully realized all that it would suggest were anyone—even Billie—to come upon them now!

The idea brought her quickly to her feet, and for refreshment she bathed her face and hands in the raindrops pouring from the rocks at the entrance to the cave. A small handkerchief was used as a very inadequate towel in which to dry herself, after which she realized her gnawing hunger. But food there was little or none! She must wait till Jack Dysart awoke to discover if he had reserved any of the sandwiches for the morning, so she waited patiently for him to wake. But Nature was revenging herself on him in dreamless slumber. Not being troubled with nervousness, his sleep was deep and undisturbed.

After a while she diverted her mind with the horse. The gentle creature nosed her with soft, dilating nostrils while she stroked his satin coat. She peeped into the

recesses of the cave and saw moss and lichen growing in the places where water percolated through the rocks invisibly. When she returned, Captain Dysart had just awakened and was stretching his cramped limbs. Again Edwina glowed inwardly with secret admiration of his fine physique, his good looks, and her eyes refused to meet his for very self-consciousness. In daylight, she could not believe that she had actually slept through the night beside him on a straw bed.

Before Dysart considered their own need of refreshment, he led the poor, lame horse out into the rain and to the waterfall for a drink, and to nibble whatever of grass could be found growing by the way. Consequently, he returned with wet feet and the rain water streaming from his mackintosh.

"I imagine that you are feeling famished," said he, undoing the luncheon bag, and Edwina was amazed to find how much he had saved for the morning.

"I don't believe you had anything last night!" she cried in distress. "You have starved yourself?—Jack!"

"Not a bit of it—I ate something—besides, I was not hungry, I assure you!"

"That's not true!—I shall not touch a morsel. It's your turn."

"Wina, don't be absurd!" They argued and Edwina showed she could be very obstinate. She was sure that Billie and others would arrive shortly, for he, at least, knew where to look for her, so she would wait till he came.

"That is, if the servants were wise enough to go direct to him. On the other hand, he might be down the line, or visiting some distant police station, and it might be evening before he even hears that you never came home at all. So be sensible and eat even a little of what we have.

I'll go in search of a village. At least I can fetch milk and such food as the natives fare on. Will you mind very much my going?"

"I'll mind dreadfully, but if you think you should go, I'll try to be patient and courageous."

"No harm will come to you at all."

Having decided to sally forth in quest of a village, Dysart consented to share a portion of the sandwiches, and they slaked their thirst in rainwater.

"I may have to descend some distance to a lower level," he explained before starting out, "for I thought last evening that I saw smoke beyond a spur lower down, so don't be alarmed if I am not back for an hour or two."

"I hate to let you go!" she cried, all anxiety and distress. "You will take care of yourself? I know I shall be full of fears for you, for you know you are too daring and venturesome."

"I have got to take care of myself for your sake, little girl, so don't worry," said he, his eyes bent on hers caressingly.

But Edwina was filled with dread, imagining all manner of ills. Suppose he never returned? Suppose he were attacked by a bear and killed? Presentiment was strong upon her, and in the end she did not want him to go at all. Her pleading eyes lifted to his were the most beautiful he had seen.

"Why, where is all that wonderful courage for which you are famed?" he teased gently. "Be plucky. I can at least make an attempt. If it is fruitless, I can but return."

Eventually, he went, but not before he had taken both her hands in his for a moment and kissed each in turn, leaving Edwina thoroughly unstrung and emotional.

Why should she be so distressed? She was not a weakling,

to be afraid because she was alone! It was as though she had parted from a lover, and that was ridiculous! She had let him kiss her hands! a triumph for him when she had so long kept him at a distance! It only showed how insidiously the man won his way with women.

These, however, were exceptional circumstances, and she took comfort that her self-respect might be restored.

Edwina liked to think that Jack Dysart admired her for her pluck, and long after he had gone her whole frame vibrated to the magnetism of his handclasp. She knew that he was attracted to her, that he was finding her companionship a pleasure, and by his attitude towards her, that, at least, he was filled with respect. Had she been another sort of girl in the same circumstances he would have treated her very differently. Girls were so foolish and had themselves to blame when they encouraged men to take liberties. With a man like Jack Dysart, it would have been a losing game for a girl if she had allowed circumstances to have robbed her of self-respect. It was her intention, however much she was drawn to him, to keep him at a distance. He should never know how it had thrilled her when his lips lingered tenderly on her hands, or how susceptible she was to his looks and tones. It would have to be a long time before she allowed him to think that Edwina Hope had rid herself of unfortunate, earlier, bad impressions. He was still the man who had made Pearle Bainbridge love him, and had so nearly wrecked her life.

Whenever she was inclined to weaken towards him, she would have to remind herself of this unforgettable fact.

Yet, the tendency was for her to forget it, for she caught herself nursing in his absence every feminine folly while thinking of him. Her mind was obsessed by his resolution —his strength—his personality. Everything about him

captivated her fancy. She dwelt on his feat of yesterday which the excitement of events had not allowed her to appreciate fully, and she was near adoration.

It was something she would have to think of with wonderment and awe for the rest of her days. It wiped out a great deal of his past follies and misdoings, and Edwina wept to think of how ungrateful she must have appeared.

But she listened hourly for his returning footsteps, only to hear the falling rain and blowing wind. She was again almost faint with hunger and a longing for tea. What a habit tea in the morning was with most people! She smoked for a while to deaden the pangs.

How time dragged without Dysart beside her to wile it away! Though he had not spoken a word of love to her, she was trembling and thrilled at the thought of his return!

What priceless fools women were, she repeated scathingly to herself to check her sentimental yearnings. She would have to be very careful that he must never guess her folly, but always look back on the misadventure that had marooned them at the caves with a high opinion of her courage and character.

By midday, Edwina felt famished, and yet there was no sign of Captain Dysart. In her depressed state she was filled with forebodings, imagining all manner of catastrophies. He might now be lying in some ravine into which he had fallen, injured—having broken a limb—and unable to help himself. He might lie so for days and die of exposure before any hillman saw him and brought succour! The caves were situated in the more uninhabited part of those regions, and in bad weather it was conceivable that days might pass without a soul venturing in this direction.

She could not bear to think of such a thing, and her anxiety increased, making her suffer tortures. But what was she to do? Surely Billie would come in search of her! —she prayed that he might come soon, so that he might look for Captain Dysart. But if he had gone on an expedition to a rural police station, there would be no one else likely to know in which direction she and Dysart had ridden out.

As the hours slipped by she prayed that someone would be guided to the caves in search of her. It was not like Captain Dysart to stay away so long. Something must have happened. She was sick at heart with suspense, realizing that her fears were more for him than the fact of her own unfortunate predicament. She paced the entrance restlessly, pausing every now and again to listen for sounds, only to hear the wind roar and the rain patter incessantly. In the afternoon the rain was considerably lighter, and the wind had almost dropped, and still no relief for her from the gnawing suspense and anxiety. Hunger was weakening her morale, and hope deferred breaking her spirit.

She wrung her hands when she could no longer bear her suspense, and ran out into the rain to look everywhere on the hillside for some sign of humanity. But the mountains were still veiled in pearly mists, and the hill road, as far as she could see it winding with every bend and curve of the hill, showed no sign of life. Not even a bird was visible —birds at all times being rare in those altitudes.

Suddenly, through the silence and mists, came lagging footsteps, and her heart stood still. Boots crunching the gravel of the pebbly roadway. The natives never wore boots.

It was Dysart, covered with mud and soaked through,

his limbs utterly weary, one arm supported by a hand, and his face as white as chalk.

"Oh, Jack!" she gasped. "You are hurt!" Edwina ran to him, begging him with tears and sobs to lean on her.

"Why, Wina! you are crying?—and for me? Cheer up!" he tried to smile, but the smile grew wry with pain. "Remember, it is 'Never say die'."

"When you did not return, I nearly died of anxiety! I pictured you lying dead—" she tried to choke back her sobs, relieved to find him alive, yet distressed to see his state. But you have met with an accident! What has happened?"

"It's my arm. I'm afraid it is broken," came through his pale lips, for the pain was excruciating. "Would you mind giving me a drink of whisky—the flask is in my pocket. I can't let go my arm."

He sank down on the straw and Edwina did as he asked, swiftly—silently, trembling from head to foot with sympathy and alarm, altogether forgetful of self.

"Don't worry," he said, again and again. "I'll try to explain, presently."

She saw that he was faint and not in a fit state to talk, so she waited for orders, watching him with her heart in her eyes.

"I'll have to get a splint of some sort. Do you think you could look outside for a straight twig or two? Sort of first aid," he tried to smile. "And then you must tear a strip from the blanket and make a sling."

Edwina ran out into the road and looked all about her for anything that would serve for a splint. In a little while she was able to break off a slender green branch of a sapling growing on the bank, and tearing her silk stockings into strips made an effective bandage for his arm.

"I cannot let you go barefooted!" he exclaimed with a groan.

"My feet will be quite warm in the boots," she returned. "There is nothing else, so don't say a word."

When the sling was ready, and in position, Dysart was easier and more able to describe the accident which had had such disastrous results.

"I was making for the spot lower down behind that spur below this hill, when I slipped on the *pugdundi**—it was like glass in the rain, and I must have fallen about thirty feet, mercifully across a tree trunk where I lay for hours with my arm broken. I think I must have had a series of fainting fits, or concussion—anyway, it has left me with a splitting headache, and I feel absolutely stupid—can't think. All I knew was the need to get back. At first I couldn't rise, and it seemed that I would have to lie there till someone found me. But the rain was adding to the trouble, and I—I thought of you, Wina, all alone. I simply had to make an effort. I couldn't tell you what it was like, getting back to the road with only one hand to hold with, the broken arm dangling and useless, and paining like—hell. It seems ages ago—I have lost count of time, and my watch is smashed! It's been a rotten business, for I have not succeeded in getting food, and you are perishing with hunger."

"So are you! What a calamity that you should have been so hurt!"

"I'd bear the hurt, but to think of you—poor little girl!—you will never forgive me for this business!"

"I'll never forgive myself for letting you go to hunt for that village in such weather!"

"My poor old gee, too, is starving!" as a whinny from

*Steep path.

his horse told him that the animal was hungry. "I'll take him out to graze by the roadside."

"Be still! You mustn't move. I'll take him," said Edwina.

"You are so wonderful!"

"Not a bit!—the rain is much lighter, and I have my mac."

A moment later she returned, having tethered the horse to a tree, saying that he was grazing on the short grass growing on the bank, and seemed to be enjoying himself. His lameness was already better, so, at least, they had that to be thankful for. "I dare say," she added as cheerily as she could, "we shan't have too long to wait. Trust Billie to track us down."

"He'll do it if he dies for it!" said Dysart. "I would do the same for you!"

"I am so pleased to have two strong champions," she returned, laughing. "What a terrible sight you are!—and I must look like nothing on earth, not having had a proper wash!— But nothing matters, since you are alive and back again."

"You were glad to see me, anyhow?"

"I cannot tell you how glad!—I was bordering on lunacy because of your long absence! I seemed to sense that something had happened, and a little more suspense would have sent me out to look for you. Oh, how I prayed for your safe return!"

"You prayed for me?" He was greatly touched, and unable to forget that Edwina had actually prayed for him. He had not prayed for himself, having long ceased to think that prayers were of any avail from the unrighteous.

After a while, he remembered to tell her of what he had discovered on his disastrous expedition.

The Bhutan pony lying dead at the bottom of a ravine. "He looked as if he had broken his neck, and a good thing, too, or he would have been dead by nightfall from injuries and exposure. To think that it would also have been your fate unless you had fallen off on the road!"

"If I had, I might have also broken my neck—or head!" She shuddered at the thought. "I owe my safety to you, Captain Dysart," she said shyly.

"'Jack'," he amended.

"Jack," she repeated.

"I would be content if I could think that you were feeling more tolerant of me," said he.

"I cannot connect you any longer with the man I first knew," said she.

"I am not that fellow at all since knowing you, Wina. I have no longer any use for him!"

"That's good news."

A sudden feeling of self-consciousness overcame Edwina and she walked to the entrance to examine the weather.

CHAPTER XIX

"IT'S A LONG LANE—"

DYSART lay back on the straw with eyes closed and lips compressed, for his arm ached intolerably and his head felt very queer. Moreover, as he had eaten less than half of his share of sandwiches so that Edwina should be fed, his faintness was due, a great deal, to his need of food.

The care of the horse now devolved on Edwina, and she was glad to do something to show that she was not altogether useless and a burden. Even to starve was her pride, since he was starving, too. She wished to keep courageous now that she had him back again, and leave him memories of her that would raise her high in his estimation. Time was, when she would not have cared what Captain Dysart thought of her. Now, she was all sympathy and love—if he only knew it! Many a girl in her place would have shown it openly, but that was not Edwina's nature. An invincible pride made her reserve all her feelings for the time when he should, if he must, dig them out, metaphorically speaking. He would never find it too easy to make her capitulate to his siege!

At the moment, he was in too much pain to make himself especially charming. On the contrary, in the loneliness of those mountains, he seemed anxious to steer clear of

leanings towards sentiment, and she was glad, for it made it all the easier for her to nurse him in her motherly fashion, with no hint of folly to spoil their intimacy.

She brought him rain water to drink, wet her handkerchief and laid it on his forehead, unlaced and removed his riding boots as his feet were cramped and sore. She washed them and dried them as best she could in the napkin in which the sandwiches had been wrapped, and when he dropped off to sleep, she sat by to watch over him with anxious solicitude.

Again and again she watched the road, hoping and praying that help might be forthcoming. The need of food was desperate. If only some hillmen would come that way!

Eventually, a shadow darkened the entrance, and she saw a native of those parts, his shoulder weighted with faggots, peering in on them. But she could not speak the language, so touched Dysart on the shoulder in breathless excitement.

When Dysart saw the man, he was able to explain their plight and ask for relief.

"Can you get us food—milk?" he asked him in the polyglot dialect spoken by Europeans in that part whenever they addressed the natives, and the man answered in the same.

"*Goat's* milk," said the man. "I can fetch plenty of it from the village below, if the Sahib will give money."

"Get milk and bread, if you have it—or cooked rice—*chapatis*——"

"There might not be rice," said the man dubiously. "But *chapatis*, yes. If not, they can be made in a moment."

"Bring supplies and you will be paid liberally," said Dysart, jingling money in his pocket. "Bring also coolies and a conveyance for the lady."

The man turned without a word and hurried away.

"If you had given him money with a promise of more, wouldn't that have made his return safer?"

"I never trust these fellows. He has probably far to go to his home, and with money for nothing would make speed to clear out as fast as possible. Whereas, now he has hopes, and we might possibly see him again."

It was Edwina's opinion that Billie Hutchins must have gone out of the station; consequently, he knew nothing of her continued absence from home, and no one else had troubled in the height of the storm, believing that she was well cared for under Captain Dysart's wing. In their opinion it would serve her right to be weatherbound in some shanty by the wayside, called a rest-house, many of which had been built for the convenience of travellers and *shikaris*. It would, no doubt, delight them to have a new scandal with which to entertain themselves; so until Billie returned, they might have to be cave-dwellers, subsisting on what they could find. Edwina hoped for the best, in a fever of anxiety for Captain Dysart who seemed feverish, and prayed that the *paharia* would return with food and help. He returned shortly before nightfall, bringing with him milk and a package tied up in leaves, of *chapatis* and fruit. Following him was a group of villagers with various offerings of sticky sweets and curried meat, all eager to earn the sum of money.

"We wish to return to the station. Have you a pony, or bearers who will carry the lady in a sling on poles?" Captain Dysart asked earnestly. "You will be handsomely paid."

"We might make a *dandi* by to-morrow of a sheet swung from a pole," said one, "but we have no bearers. Only those who carry can be employed. We don't carry," was the definite statement.

"Let a coolie run and tell the Sahib's friends, and they will send for the lady from the station," suggested another.

"How long will he take?" asked Dysart, translating for Edwina's benefit.

"He will reach the station in the night, and to-morrow by noon there will be help for the Sahib and his lady."

(The Sahib *and his lady*!)

Dysart refrained from repeating the phrase, but agreed that it would be the wisest plan, as the horse was in no fit state to carry a burden. So a coolie was despatched, immediately, to Rajpahar, and once again they had to face a night spent in the caves.

The villagers, however, were interested in serving the Sahib, for he had proved liberal with money. They returned with new blankets, fresh straw, and faggots of dry wood with which to build a fire.

In a little while, the cave was lighted up with a blaze, night lights of primitive oil-dips were provided, each finding a place in a niche of the rocky walls. The horse was given grain, dried grass and straw on which to lie, and altogether Edwina felt that they were rich in comforts. She might even have enjoyed the experience but for the knowledge that Dysart needed surgical attention, and was enduring a great deal of pain.

Both felt better after feeding, and the villagers retired, promising to bring fresh supplies of food in the morning.

"We are not so badly off, now," said Edwina cheerfully. "It is like being wrecked on a desert island. If only you had not broken your arm, we could have played Swiss Family Robinson. At any rate, we are as well provided as they were!"

"It is aggravating to be within reach of home and not able to get there," said Dysart, wearily.

"You are in such pain!" cried she, sympathetically, as his face responded to a twinge. "I wish I could charm it away!"

"You are charming it away all the while. I cannot tell you what it is to me to look at you and hear you speak. Do you sing? I should imagine you do, your voice is so very sweet."

Edwina blushed. It was good hearing when he was not trying to flatter. He was too much of a sufferer to say things not meant, only for the sake of pleasing.

"I do sing—a little—but haven't for months, and months, and months!"

"Sing to me, Wina? I know nothing so soothing as to listen to singing in the twilight when one is feeling miserable."

"I'll do anything to give you comfort," said she.

Edwina waited for a while, and then sang, first a simple love ballad in her small but tuneful voice, while Captain Dysart lay back watching her from between narrowed lids, a look of tender yearning in his eyes.

When she had finished, he begged for more. "I don't want to tire you, but it is delightful to listen. You could not guess how I love it—and—" his voice choked. There was a new self-restraint about him, a dawning sense of the tragedy he was facing, since Edwina was like no other

girl he had ever met, and must be protected from all harm.

He contented himself with silence and let her sing, song after song, till she could not, any more.

"How are you now?" she asked at the end of the performance, fearing that his temperature had risen.

"I'm all right, thank you," said he, reassuringly, but she placed a hand on his forehead and was dismayed to find it very hot. "Oh, Jack!—you aren't all right!"

"It's natural to get a rise of temperature after all that has happened."

It was another unspeakable night, though infinitely an improvement on the last, and when morning dawned, it was a relief, for, before many hours, relief would surely come.

And relief did come earlier than they expected. The coolie had made use of all the short cuts, and by reaching the station and explaining the needs of the Sahibs in the cave, two *dandies* and many bearers were sent to bring Jack Dysart and Edwina Hope away.

By that time Dysart was in strong fever, so the explanations fell to Edwina. She told the two officers from the cantonments who rode with the cavalcade of *dandies* and bearers all that had taken place, and was the heroine of the hour.

How much she preferred the outlook men had on cases of this sort to that of women! They were sympathetic and kind—women would have asked too many questions and their attitude towards herself, not Dysart, would have been abominable. Women were altogether too ready to hurt their own sex while according to men all their sympathy!

Billie, who had just arrived in the station, met the return party outside the station early in the afternoon, and escorted Edwina to the villa, where the servants gave her an ovation.

She made up for past discomforts as speedily as possible by taking a bath and going to bed, Billy promising to bring her news of Jack Dysart the next day.

CHAPTER XX

CALLERS

As a result of her exposure to cold and damp, Edwina was confined to the house for some days with that most unromantic of maladies, a catarrh, and had to feel thankful that it was no worse.

Billie called every day at the tea hour, to sit and gossip and condole with her, and sometimes the "boys" looked in to ask how she was progressing, but there was no direct message from Captain Dysart. She was deeply wounded and afraid that she had been exaggerating things. Pride, instantly in arms, made her refrain from sending him a line to ask how he was doing, or even a message through Billie. He could have sent her many, but there was no message from him.

Billie reported that his arm had been set and all was going well with him. He was even out and about with it in a sling. Someone had seen him lunching with Mrs. Cavil at a restaurant. At least, they were seen talking on the doorstep at the lunch hour. He could do all that and yet keep away from her! Edwina shed tears of anger and humiliation in secret, wondering why she had been such a fool as to imagine that a leopard could change his spots. He was probably so sure that he had broken down all her defences that he was already weary of the game! In her pain and disappointment she was ready to go to the opposite extreme and judge him unfairly.

She believed that there were men who enjoyed the honour and glory of being credited with affairs with women. They would, under the same circumstances, have allowed things to appear worse than they were by merely being silent when chaffed. It was so easy to say nothing and leave too much to be inferred. If Jack Dysart were that sort of a person, Edwina felt she would never want to speak to him again.

She questioned Billie. The latter had hinted that he was not on speaking terms with some of the ladies in the station for their nasty remarks; and Edwina probed further to find out how Captain Dysart was taking the gossip.

"Who are my friends and who are my enemies?" she questioned. "I have a right to know, Billie."

"I hate to make mischief."

"It isn't mischief. I should know what people are saying, and who says what. Do they want to consider me bad just because it was unavoidable, my being at the caves two nights with Captain Dysart?"

"The world is dam' censorious and unreasonable. They may not think you did wrong, but they can't get over the fact, and say that Dysart should offer to marry you."

"Billie!—how beastly people can be!" cried Edwina, flushing to the roots of her hair. If 'people'—the Grundies of Rajpahar—were saying *that* and it had reached Captain Dysart's ears, no wonder he was keeping away, not being disposed to do any such thing—and no more should he! She felt furious with rage and humiliation. What right had people to say such things! Why should they try to force men to do what they did not *want* to do? She remembered how aloof he had been in the cave, and how easy it would have been for a man of his reputation and type to have seized that opportunity to make love to her.

Had he been in love, not just admiring and respectful, how could he have helped showing his feelings? He could have made love to her in a thousand ways, and *she* would have been compelled to restrain him. Men were not too thoughtful or self-restrained—certainly not men like Jack Dysart!

Oh, dear! oh, dear! She fluttered inwardly in distress and shame. To think that they might be telling Jack that he should propose! and he, hating to be pressed into anything so fateful, keeping away from her—taking time, possibly, to think it over, and trying to bring himself to the point of doing the "right thing".

"Billie, has anyone said anything of the kind to Captain Dysart?"

"Why do you worry? Who cares two hoots what people say? Captain Jack doesn't, certainly! He never has cared. He's not on for marrying anyone; he's not going to be shoved into matrimony by a parcel of old Killkenny cats. He likes you awfully, I know. But he's not a marrying man. I have come to the conclusion."

Billie did not mind admitting that he had suffered terribly from jealousy when he heard the news the moment he set foot in the station the morning of Edwina's rescue. "The only thing that comforted me was that you never have had any use for Captain Dysart, and he'd know, pretty quick, not to attempt to insult you in any way. Unfortunately this little station—I refer to the part that is Society with a capital S—is dam' spiteful, so be sure they'll make a nine days' wonder out of it and then drop it altogether."

"I don't care for them. What upsets me is that anyone should have put such an idea into his head!"

"He wouldn't need to have it put there. One generally

knows what the world expects when people get into that sort of a mess—I mean—you know—" getting hopelessly confused. "It is being all night—two nights—in that outlandish place—and he without a shred of character where women are concerned. A—people pretend to feel for you and speak only in your interests—but it is generally supposed to be the thing—that is, any man in Jack Dysart's place would feel—a—sort of bound, you know."

"Billie!—I'll hate you if you say another word in that strain," she cried, tears of mortification in her eyes.

"Why, I don't mean any harm, Wina dear. I would be the first person to be badly hit over it if such a thing happened, for I want to marry you myself, but I'm only trying to explain the situation which—naturally—or——"

"That will do! I suppose Captain Dysart rather enjoys the situation. He would!—and let people imagine all sorts of things not true!"

"There you are mistaken. I did not want to tell you, but there was a beastly row at the Club last night because someone tried to chaff him. Without any warning, he hit out with his only free arm and caught the johnnie such a smashing blow on the jaw that he measured his length on the floor. The man—you don't know him—was for having a fight the minute he was on his feet, and Jack would have taken him on with one hand, but it wasn't allowed. The other fellows interfered and made the man apologize for what he said——"

"What did he say?" asked Wina, her eyes kindling.

"That's nothing to do with us. I promised not to mention it outside, but I only told you so you need not misjudge Jack. He might not want to get married, but, by Jove!—he does think a lot of you, Wina. Give the devil his due."

Edwina felt much happier after that, though she admitted to herself that she would have been happier if Jack Dysart had shown himself eager to marry her. Of course, she would have refused him, to put an end to all doubt respecting her pride and dignity. Nothing in the world would induce her to accept Dysart now, even if he decided to offer her marriage so as to do "the right thing by her", and satisfy old women and gossips.

Shortly after this conversation with Billy, Edwina was surprised to receive a call from Mrs. Cavil, who arrived in her rickshaw, drawn and propelled by hillmen in flame-coloured livery. She was dressed in the height of fashion, her shingled hair tucked into a closely fitting silk hat which came down to her ears and tilted slightly over one eye, a dress far too short for a woman in her thirties, nude silk stockings, and a cloak fresh from Paris. She slouched into the drawing-room where Edwina was ready to receive her, and spoke with an affected drawl.

"I heard you were not well after your return, Miss Hope, so did not call before. I hope you are now quite yourself again." She sank gracefully into a chair, crossed her legs, and lolled back among the cushions as though she had a weak spine.

"I am perfectly well," said Edwina, smiling, as she was feeling rather grateful that one of the ladies had condescended to call and commiserate her on her late misadventure. She therefore thawed immediately. "It is very kind of you to come."

"I thought I would come and see you since you have no one of your own with you, and the Bainbridges are away. As a matter of fact, I felt you would be needing advice. I am older than you—though I dare say

I don't look it!—people say I never look my age!" she simpered. "Anyway, I have no doubt you are annoyed by all this gossip. This is a terrible place for talk! Personally, I don't care who talks. If we begin to mind what people say, we might as well be slaves! May I smoke?"

"Oh, do," said Edwina, very pleased with Mrs. Cavil in spite of her affectations and the fact that she had given rise to some of the worst gossip the station had known. "I'll get you cigarettes——"

"*Please* don't!" said Mrs. Cavil, producing a gold cigarette case. "Will you?"

Edwina refused, as she smoked rarely, and Mrs. Cavil lighted up in professional style.

"This is a charming villa. I know Mrs. Bainbridge very slightly, and have always admired her exceedingly. Such a beauty! Captain Dysart was dreadfully enamoured till he thought better of it and cooled off. What do you think of Jack Dysart?" (regarding Edwina through narrowed lids and puffing a column of smoke). "You had an excellent opportunity of knowing him—dear me! —it must have been very embarrassing for you. Do tell me all about it. Ever since I heard of the affair, I have wanted to know your experiences! He's a bad boy, Jack Dysart," she said slyly, leaving a pause for Edwina to come in if she liked.

"I found him very chivalrous and considerate. No one could have been kinder."

Mrs. Cavil laughed insolently. "Of course, you must *say* that, but you don't mean to tell me he never tried to make love to you?"

"I do mean to tell you so. Whoever thinks otherwise is insulting us both."

"I don't want to insult you, but—I know Jack Dysart, my dear girl! He can no more help spooning and carrying on, than a bird can help flying. You see, everyone is sure of it, that is why there is all this ill-natured gossip. I come as a friend, not to be ill-natured, but to hear the whole story. If things had been different, he might have asked you to marry him, but I happen to know he can't do that. This is quite between ourselves, mind you, and I say it in the strictest confidence. I do not wish it to go back to him on any account. Nor can I say more. Just that, he will never marry you or any girl, so it is a pity people should make all that fuss. I do feel sorry for you."

The conversation continued for some time in this vein, subtly provocative, till Edwina began to be angry, especially as she was beginning to suspect that Mrs. Cavil had called purely out of curiosity and not good feeling. "Do you still insist that Captain Dysart made love to me in the cave?" she asked coldly. The fact that Jack Dysart would never marry she set aside, mentally, for future consideration.

"It would be very rude if I insisted," said the lady, blowing a cloud of smoke in Edwina's direction, and smiling meaningly. "But I do want to know what you think of him."

"Does it matter what I think of him?"

"Not at all. Only I thought I'd warn you not to fall in love with him. He is very irresistible, I know, but there's nothing doing there, and he'll take good care that he is not the sufferer when it comes to the parting of the ways, nor will it trouble him if your character is torn to shreds because of him. I have watched him all these months and heard of his doings since the War—

of course, you know that we are old friends—met during the War while I was engaged in war work. I could tell you a great deal about him—for instance, he need not remain in the Army, but does so for a hobby. He has a large private income and could go where he chose, but it pleases him to keep his profession and play the mischief at Rajpahar where he seems to find amusement in compromising girls—or let us say *a* girl—and setting the station by the ears. You will do well if you refuse to see him again."

"We are scarcely likely to see much of each other, as I am not going out and do not mean to ask him to call, but it will not be for the reason you imagine. I care nothing for gossip. Friends of my own will not make a mistake about me, and strangers do not count. Captain Dysart and I belong to quite different worlds, that is why I am not keen to further the acquaintance. At the same time," Edwina continued, warming to her subject, "I have every cause to respect Captain Dysart and I would trust myself in his company above all other men."

Mrs. Cavil shrugged her shoulders and, dropping her cigarette end in an ash-tray, rose to depart. "You have a very independent nature for a young girl, and I hope understand where it has led you. I should not be surprised, when the Bainbridges hear of your escapade, if they do not hold a very lenient view of the case. However, it is no business of mine. Good-bye." She offered her hand which Edwina ignored.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Cavil. It was most philanthropic of you to call this afternoon," said Edwina. "Perhaps I am not sufficiently appreciative."

"If I could persuade you to take advice, you would find another billet."

"If Mrs. Bainbridge wishes me to stay, I shall be here for the rest of the season," Edwina answered quietly, and bowed stiffly, a glitter of steel in her lustrous eyes.

It was a day of annoyances, Edwina was to learn, for her next visitor was her stepmother, who came quivering with agitation to learn the truth of the affair. It had reached her on the tea-garden, and she had taken a day off to call and see Edwina, hoping that the story had been grossly exaggerated.

With her, Edwina's feeling changed to one of amusement. She dearly loved to tease Mrs. Hope with arguments and remarks that made her furious. Having no sense of humour, her stepmother was easily tricked into angry disapproval.

After a perfunctory peck on the cheek, she disclosed the reason of her visit and waited to have her fears confirmed.

"It is quite true," she said, a twinkle in her eye. "I am thoroughly compromised. Isn't it dreadful!"

"Is that the way you take it?—you, an unmarried girl? Can't you see the far-reaching effect of such a calamity? Not that I think for a moment there was any wrong in it, seeing that it was accidental and unavoidable."

"Which is more than others will allow."

"But what concerns me is that you have *done* for yourself. Unless Captain Dysart proposes marriage, no one else is likely to, after your passing two nights with him in the caves!"

"*One* cave," murmured Edwina.

"Has he said anything?"

"What is he to say?"

"I mean, has he asked you to marry him?"

"No. And has no intention of doing so. Why should he?"

"What does that matter? He owes it to you," said the lady agitatedly. "He should. It is the honourable thing to do, but rumour says that if he had done the honourable thing by the girls he has compromised, he'd have a harem by now! To think that you should have been so imprudent with a man like that! Of course you will now go away from the station?"

"Oh, no. Not unless I am dismissed. I am very happy here and still have a few friends left."

"I do declare, Wina, that you are lost to all sense of shame and pride. Your pride should dictate that you leave at once. How can you bear to be cut, and so talked about? If you only knew the things that are being said about you. Your poor dear father would turn in his grave if he knew the half of it!"

"How do you know that he doesn't, or that he hasn't turned in his grave? We can't find out, unfortunately!"

Mrs. Hope looked at her uncertainly, the cigarette bobbing with agitation. "I am sure, I fail to make you out. But one thing I do know, and that is, as your nearest relative in India, it is my bounden duty to call on Captain Dysart and point out——"

This was enough for Edwina. The twinkle vanished and sparks glinted in her eyes. "Please remember that I am of age, Mrs. Hope," said she, rising as a hint to her to go, "and that I will not tolerate any interference from you between Captain Dysart and myself. This is my affair, and if I prefer to leave things where they are, you will understand that you have nothing to do with the matter."

"You are a fool, girl!" cried Mrs. Hope, losing her patience and temper together. "Don't you know that Captain Dysart belongs to a very good family at home

nd has lots of money?—that there will be a lot more hen an uncle or a nephew dies and he becomes Lord omething or another of Hartledene in Norfolk? I found ll this out before I came to see you. People who were t the tea-garden where I am governess know of him ery well—or people who know his family at home very ell—and they said that you would be a very lucky girl f he did propose, only no one believes that he will ever narry. He is not what is called a 'marrying man'. Of ll the fools in Christendom, commend me to the daughter f John Joseph Hope!" She rose, gibbering with nervous xcitement, her words falling over one another as she athered her belongings: a shopping bag, an umbrella t large dimensions, and her gloves. "Since you will o your way, I wash my hands of you for ever. At least, t is no credit to know a girl who hasn't a rag left to her eputation."

With that, she bustled away with long strides, also craping the dust off her feet on the door-mat.

Edwina was glad to see the last of her, and returned o her seat to think over Mrs. Cavil's remarks concerning Jack Dysart.

What did she mean by saying that he would never narry—as if she knew all about it?

That could only be the case if he already had a wife! Yet o one seemed to know anything about his private affairs.

She concluded that it was only a little jealous bluff n the part of Mrs. Cavil who was, herself, openly nterested in him. She was afraid of the consequences f an intimate friendship between him and any unmarried irl, lest he should actually fall in love and contemplate narriage, or why did she take such pains to disillusion er rival?

CHAPTER XXI

THE TRUTH

EDWINA'S cold passed and she was altogether herself again as the weeks went by, for she was glad to think that the Bainbridges at least were her staunch friends. She had written a full account of her misadventure in the mountains, and though others had also, apparently, written, she had received letters from both Mr. and Mrs. Bainbridge, giving her their whole-hearted sympathy.

A change had come over the spirit of Pearle Bainbridge and her letters were happier and less self-centred. She was noticing things again and seeing the humour of life. Occasionally, she mentioned her husband, and no longer in bitter terms. It seemed that they were becoming good friends. She even said in one of her letters that he was wonderfully long-suffering and patient with her.

"Though I know he can have no feeling left for me," she wrote, cheerfully, "he is sporting enough not to throw things up to me, so I find that it is quite possible for us to get along well together. He wants nothing that I am not willing to give, and gives me absolute freedom to please myself. Strange as it might sound, I don't seem to want it now. I almost wish he would become a bit exacting so that I should be called upon to obey him against my will and, in this way, expiate my sins of the past."

In the last one, Edwina saw signs of pique because it was apparent that her husband, who, it seemed, was a great favourite in the English community where they were staying, was so completely indifferent to her looks as not to notice what she wore, or if it became her. It was very humiliating, especially as other men were not so indifferent. She, however, had no interest in any man!—she met so many at the Club!—her recent experience had made her feel that the admiration of men was just froth—nothing more!

"I don't blame Basil," she went on, "for it is quite natural after all that has happened. I have myself to blame, and having made my bed, must lie on it. But being so young, it is rather a dreary outlook. So little to look forward to. We have met such charming people," she wrote, "the Lesters from Simla, a perfectly happy couple. It makes you see that married life can be perfectly wonderful when the husband and wife are of one accord. That is—they love each other tremendously and are simply wrapped up in their boy—such a darling baby. It makes me wish I had our darling Bizzie here.

"It is quite a revelation to see Mr. and Mrs. Lester together. You begin to realize the meaning of marriage. I often envy them. If only I had known them earlier! You see, I did not love Basil when we married. He, too, did not understand my nature. If he had not taken married life so much for granted and expected me to be old like himself—I mean staid and contented—I shouldn't have been foolish and tried to find my pleasures apart from him. When a man marries a girl a lot younger than himself, he should unbend and live down to her till she catches him up. We do, for women seem to age so much faster than men. Basil is only now beginning to wake

up and become young. He surprises me, for the other night there was a dance and he actually danced all the evening. He did not know how, last year, and used to play cards at dances, then look bored in doorways wanting to go home to bed. Last night it was I who was bored, but I did not hurry him home as he seemed to be enjoying himself so much—the ladies all make such a fuss of him. Many of them are real cats! I hate them so. A woman with red hair and thin lips (they are always feline) told me in Basil's presence that she admired him tremendously, as he was her beau ideal of 'the strong, silent man'. I don't trust women who flatter men to their faces, no matter who is by. They imagine it is smart, but I call it vulgar and impudent. I am not speaking to her now. Basil says it's rude, and that people have to camouflage their feelings; but I never could. Of course, Basil is handsome and very dignified. I have noticed latterly that the slight baldness on his temples is really rather becoming to his type—the austere sort. But he smiles very sweetly, and people find him most attractive. I have been studying the reason, and have come to the conclusion that it is because he has an air about him of pride and self-respect that makes him a Somebody, no matter where he goes.

"Dear me, I seem to have done nothing but write about Basil, but it has been rather entertaining to study him, since he has come out in a new light. If he had only done so before, even I might have admired him! Instead, I admired and was silly about that worthless Captain Dysart who has brought so much trouble on you by that ill-judged outing. Still, considering he saved your life, one has to overlook his carelessness. You must know him pretty well by now, having spent two nights and days

in the cave! Of course, he tried to make love to you. He could not help it, for he is made that way—women are his natural prey. But you must have taught him a wholesome lesson. He wants a few of the sort to teach him that he is not irresistible. When next you write, tell me how he behaved. To think that a while back I would have been madly jealous of you! How like an illness an infatuation is! And now I have recovered and can even laugh at myself for being such an outrageous fool. Again, I must tell you how I shall always think of you with affection and gratitude for the service you did me that memorable night before you fell so terribly ill! You might have died for my sake!

"Biddy Hale—the girl who has a 'pash' for me—writes me screeds of loving effusions and says dreadful things of Jack Dysart and Mrs. Cavil. She is sure that there was a liaison in that quarter about the same time as he was my devoted cavalier. Just think of it! She says that he used to go to her place after the theatre for a quiet supper laid for two, and no one knows at what hour he came away. Servants talk, you know! I shudder when I think of his perfidy! Fancy his seeing me home and going straight from me to sit with her till all hours of the night! I can't get over it. It makes me sick, and I feel inclined to run to Basil and howl on his breast. I couldn't see Basil doing such a thing. After parties, he brings me home and retires to his own cabin and bed. It is next to mine, so I know it. Mrs. Cavil must be furious with you for having Jack Dysart to yourself for all that time!"

Edwina could now guess the reason of Mrs. Cavil's animosity towards herself. If it were true that Jack Dysart was once her lover, she would naturally act

venomously towards anyone who seemed to be taking him from her.

One day, soon after Mrs. Bainbridge's letter, given above, Edwina, who had been schooling herself to forget Dysart's existence, since he had ignored hers for so long, was startled to find him framed in the doorway of the drawing-room, having arrived unannounced as no servant was in sight. It was a time of the day when the servants usually had their midday siesta; the Mall lay beneath a flood of brilliant sunshine, silent and deserted, for it was after the luncheon hour when most people were in their homes before sallying forth for afternoon engagements.

Edwina had been trying to concentrate her mind on her library book, and rose, dismayed at the apparition, trembling from head to foot, for there was something in Captain Dysart's eyes that told of a crisis at hand. His arm was no longer in a sling, and he looked strangely white and nervous.

"I came—because I am going away. I had no right to come, but as I am going away, you will have to forgive my weakness and be kind," said he, reaching her side and taking both her hands in his. "Look at me—let me see your sweet eyes to carry the memory of their purity and beauty with me wherever I may go. Let me hold you in my arms—this once and never again. Wina! little Wina!" —he slipped his arms round her and drew her unresisting to his breast. It was just as though he had hypnotized her will, for she had no strength to deny him, but lay still on his breast, her heart beating like an imprisoned bird within her. "So proud!— Not a sign from you—not a message! Because I never wrote, you would have cut off your hand sooner than have asked me *why* I was

staying away. Your pride hurts me, yet I adore it! It lashes me, yet I admire it!"

He took both her arms and drew them close about his neck; he bent his face to hers, kissing her lips with lingering fervour and speaking between his kisses: "I love you!—you proud little girl! I love you too much to stay and make love to you. You knew all the while in the cave that I loved you, heart and soul, as I have never loved woman before! But it has come to me too late—this wonderful love—this deep, fathomless love that is driving me far from my paradise. God!—I want you so! I wanted to tell you this in the cave, but I did not dare. I nearly bit my tongue out when the words so nearly left my lips!"

"Jack!—have mercy!" The agony of loving was so great that Edwina could not tell if it was joy or pain. He talked of going! All she knew was that she could not let him go. Where was the use of all her pride and indignation against him when his arms about her, his lips on hers, rendered her nerveless and as wax in his hands?

"Do you love me a little?" he asked, his eyes trying to read hers.

"Since when have you—cared—like this?" she asked him shyly.

"Since when? Ever since that night when you covered me with your scorn and contempt—but always my ideal of womanhood has been yourself. Only it has materialized too late!" There was indescribable suffering in his tones.

"Why too late, Jack?" She nestled closer in his arms, eager for kisses that brought back her prophetic dream, and made it true.

"Must I tell you—? It is your right, sweetheart."

"Are you married?" she asked fearlessly. Anything was better than suspense.

"Yes," he said simply.

She buried her face on his breast and for a while there was silence while Dysart stroked back her hair and kissed it.

"It was long ago. I was married during the War to a girl I met in London. I knew nothing of her, but at that time men were reckless devils, feeling they had no tenure on life and anxious to make the most of the little time they had. Anything for distraction from the guns and the eternal shedding of blood! We married and lived in an unreal dream and did mad things. I wasn't terribly in love—just attracted. She was the sort that knew how to attract, so we had a hectic time. Later, I was wounded and taken to hospital unconscious, from injury to the head, and no one knew who I was, as I had been stripped by the Germans and left for dead, even to my identity disc. Six months later, I recovered my memory which had so long been a blank. I saw the face of an old friend and he told me who I was—then everything came back with a rush.

"In the meantime, I had been reported missing, and when it was satisfactorily proved that I was not a prisoner in Germany, it was given out that I was 'killed in action'.

"I recalled my marriage and wrote to my wife. She replied, asking me to meet her at a restaurant, and it was there that she told me what she had done. Believing me dead, she had married a fellow in the Government of India and was going to have a child. She wept, and made a scene in the little room I had engaged for us, telling me that she could not return to me, now that there was

to be the baby. For the baby's sake she wanted me to forget the marriage at the registry office—no one knew of it but ourselves. She was on the eve of going to India with her husband and asked me to be a sport—to let her alone and say nothing to anyone as she would be humiliated and disgraced.

"I did not care for her, anyway, for I knew that my marriage had been a howling mistake, so I let her go, glad to be rid of her, and did not see her again till eight years after—in India. My battery was stationed in Calcutta and her husband was high up in the Government in the same city. We met and kept up the pretence of being new acquaintances. This year we have found ourselves in the same station—she, miserable in her marriage as it did not turn out a success. Her husband leaves her to herself as he is wedded to his work, and her two children are in England. She is sorry for her folly, and I have had some trouble in making her understand that an intimacy between us is no longer desirable on my part. I have always been a reckless devil, and perhaps I have been weak in my dealings with her—weak and treacherous—to the man who has paid for her loyalty; but, when she pointed out to me that ours was the legal relationship, I had no arguments for her. But it made her happy to have me visit her, so this went on till—you came into my life—and then . . .

"There came an end to the life I had been leading. I did not lie when I told you that the old Jack was dead and that a new one had come to life at your bidding—It is God's truth that I have not had anything to do with women in the old way, Wina, since you drove me out of that narrow strip of garden—— "

"Where you said you might so easily throw me down

the *khud*!" whispered Edwina, barely loud enough for him to hear her.

"Oh, my darling!—and you thought such a thing possible! Do you, now?"

"How could I, after the way in which you saved my life on the Singaling mountain!"

"Then you love me?"

"Yes." She raised her face to his and their lips met to cling in passionate silence for a space.

"Who is that woman, Jack?"

"Mrs. Cavil," said he.

"I guessed as much," she moaned, because she knew she would have to give him up; as greatly as she loved him, she would not ask him to stay. If he was married, he was not for her. They would cling to each other for a moment, love each other in innocent fashion, and part —for ever. He was right to go, for they were both human and passionately in love.

This both realized. He stayed for a while, passionately grieved at having to go, but aware that he had no other alternative.

When he could no longer remain with her, the parting was a wrench, and the door closed on his vanishing form. Edwina was left to stifle heartbroken sobs and try to teach herself to endure.

So her romance seemed to end, her whole world to darken, and she be utterly bereft!

CHAPTER XXII

RED-HANDED

EDWINA lay among the pillows of the couch for a long time after Dysart had left her, trying to learn philosophy. What can't be cured has to be endured, and she would have to endure her heartache and yearning till she became used to the pain—there was so much of it in the world! It was better than death, and so many lost their loved ones by death! At least, she knew the truth, and no longer doubted the man she loved. He had told her everything which he could only have done because his love was sincere and true. He was, indeed, a new Jack Dysart, and the old one was no more.

Mrs. Cavil—the vile creature who had tried to keep two husbands, deceiving the father of her children—stood between the true lovers. Why did such women live! Edwina felt it was only right that she should be exposed and divorced. But a divorce would be impossible since her bigamy was condoned by Jack himself for the sake of her offspring. If Mr. Cavil knew, he would cast her out without regret, for it was common knowledge that they had no love for each other. But Jack had promised not to betray her, and the situation was hopeless.

In the days that followed Dysart's departure from Rajpahar, Edwina cared little for her enemies in the station, her spirit being supported by the knowledge

of his love and the memory of their last few hours together. At last, she had experienced such kisses as had come to her in her dream of love. It had been Jack then, and Jack now. And there would never be any other as long as she lived. The wicked, unscrupulous Jack Dysart! Whenever she thought of him as such, her lips would part in a tender smile, for that had never been the real Jack. The *roué* had evolved from the unacknowledged husband of a dishonourable wife. He had sworn away his right to freedom, and in his contempt of women, had lived to ruin women.

He had now proved his regeneration, however, by leaving Rajpahar rather than play with the temptation to claim his love in spite of every obstacle. Edwina believed herself strong enough to resist her longing and desire for her true mate, yet was glad not to be made to put that strength to the test, for human nature is at all times fallible. He, however, had spared her any necessity to decide, for his love and respect had made it impossible for him to do with her what he had been ever-ready to do with others. And thus was his love vindicated.

Since they had to be parted, they indulged their craving for communion by an unflagging correspondence. As the weeks passed the post carried their letters to and fro, and by degrees Edwina gained resignation. There were others in the world who had suffered precisely in the same way, and those who had flown in the face of conscience and the law had invariably lived to regret their weakness. Love is made up largely of sacrifice, and through self-denial the greatest of all characters are built. This was her philosophy, and she was able to find a measure of happiness.

Billie, who knew nothing of all these conflicts, was
r devoted cavalier, and took her for long walks. One
another of "the boys" were also ready to step in, if
ity called them from the station, and Edwina was herself
gain, only there lurked behind her smile a wistfulness
at was very appealing. Often on the public roads,
e ladies she had once known at the Club passed her by,
oking the other way. Mrs. Cavil cut her remorselessly,
d her stepmother never approached the villa again,
that Edwina depended more on Billie for society than
yone in the station, and, at home, occupied her time
aying with Bizzie in the nursery.

It was a real pleasure to the girl to hear from Mrs.
ainbridge shortly after parting from Dysart that she
d her husband were reconciled and that she was happier,
far, than she deserved to be.

"Oh, Edwina dear! What a fool I have been to have
l but wrecked my life—and for whom—when I have
perfectly wonderful husband of my own. It is incon-
ivable! I am now so happy, I can't begin to tell you
w happy! Basil has been an angel of patience, and it
wonderful to think that he never really ceased to love
e, nor would he have wanted any other girl for his
fe if he had lived to a hundred!"

Edwina smiled as she recalled a conversation she had
d with Basil Bainbridge concerning the subject—but
at was finished, and would have to be forgotten.

"It is a miracle," the letter continued, "that his love
r me survived all I did to kill it! and that he now
ves me even more than before. I have been taking a
af out of your friend's book. You remember telling me
w she made her husband quite an ardent lover just by
r saucy, elusive ways? Well, it's perfectly true. Men

must be mostly alike, for the less attainable you are the more you are wanted, that is, if one knows just how much it is wise to play at that game. Of course, there are times when—but I don't know why I should be saying all this to you when you are not married—it seems out of place! only one feels one can say almost anything to you, you dear, sympathetic thing! Anyway, I must tell you how it came about. A houseboat is divine! The accommodation is limited, and with only a thin wall between us, dear old Basil used to lie awake thinking how wonderful it would be if only I got to care about him and want him for my husband. And, would you believe it? it was just the same with me. I did so want to be loved and petted! and with him so near it seemed a shame that anything should have come between us to keep us asunder. Of course, I knew that I was to blame, so, often, I cried myself to sleep, thinking of the women who were making up to him and trying to win his allegiance away from his wife. But what a worthless wife! Well, one night there was a thunderstorm of terrific violence—if you only knew what thunderstorms are like in this part of the world you would sympathize with my fright. Basil knew what a coward I always am in a thunderstorm, so he knocked and came to inspire me with confidence—so it just happened that we made it up—as naturally as anything!—and I slept in his arms for the rest of the night. It is the most wonderful miracle in life to be married to the man you can really love, so, dear Wina, never marry anyone you do not love to distraction, or you'll just miss the best."

Edwina's reply of congratulations hinted that she could safely say that she would never marry a man she did not love to distraction.

Before the close of the season, Basil Bainbridge brought is wife back to Rajpahar for the purpose of packing nd dismantling the villa for the winter months, when neir headquarters would be in Calcutta. Basil looked mazingly young and happy, and Pearle had never been o beautiful.

"What do you think of her?" he asked Edwina in his ife's presence. "Isn't she lovely?—Gad!—you perhaps nink I'm a bit of an ass, but it is just as if I am newly narried, with all the confetti and rice dropping out of ny clothes. But, joking apart, Wina dear, she's the weetest little woman alive! What a mistake I would ave made if I had not taken your advice and remained n my sulky aloofness."

Like a newly-married couple, they liked being by nemselves, and Edwina kept out of their way tactfully, elighted at the reunion. Even if the three were in the rawing-room together, Basil would pull his wife down n his knee for the pleasure of having her within his rasp, and he seemed never tired of drawing attention n her presence to the loveliness of her, just as if his eyes ere only now opened to her beauty. Edwina began to ink that Basil Bainbridge, like many other men, ad, in the past, allowed the dry-as-dust affairs of usiness to come too much in the way of domestic bliss, nd that he had only just learned to love properly as outh loves, heart and soul. Before this, he was merely man satisfied and content to know himself married, ll life gave him a bad shock.

When Pearle and her husband discovered how people Rajpahar were treating Edwina, they began to enter- in the station to show that unless their friends were repared to accept her, they would have none of them.

Consequently, for a week, the villa was very gay. No one refused the Bainbridges's invitations, as they were people renowned for their exclusiveness while their wines were of the best. So, with reluctance, Rajpahar Society had to meet Edwina Hope and acknowledge her, since the Bainbridges were determined that she should not be slighted. In that week Edwina had a queer experience of Mrs. Cavil who came one night to the villa, to dinner and bridge.

She treated Edwina as if she did not exist while brilliantly entertaining to the table in general. It was one of those formal dinners for which the Bainbridges were famous: everything exquisitely arranged; the serving immaculate; courses, a work of culinary art; and after it there was an adjournment to bridge-tables in the next room.

Mrs. Cavil, however, pleaded a headache and no concentration, so three players amused themselves at the piano with Mrs. Cavil to listen, while Edwina found herself a fourth at a bridge table.

Never in her life had Edwina played so bad a game, for she, too, was unable to concentrate. Some instinct told her that Mrs. Cavil was up to mischief. She who was a "bridge-fiend" to plead a headache! Bridge had often cured her headaches, as someone reminded her. If Pearle had not told Edwina, as dinner was over, that Mrs. Cavil was very curious to know if Captain Dysart and the "secretary" corresponded, there would have been no point in being suspicious. But Edwina could not rid herself of the feeling that Captain Dysart's ex-wife would go to any length to learn exactly the relations between him and the girl he loved. Therefore, the moment she was dummy, she slipped out of the room

nd, satisfying herself that Mrs. Cavil was not in the rawing-room, ran lightly upstairs to her bedroom.

Her opinion that Mrs. Cavil was not a lady in the ighest sense was confirmed when she found her bed-oom door locked against chance intruders. No one lse in that house could have locked the door but Mrs. Cavil, who did not wish to be caught by any of the servants n Miss Hope's bedroom.

Edwina knocked gently, whispering: "Let me in, Mrs. Cavil. I have something important to tell you." As there was no escape from the window for the lady, he opened the door after an appreciable amount of con-ideration, and made profuse apologies:

"Is this your room? I thought it was Mrs. Bainbridge's. thought I would run in for a minute for sal volatile—*am* so sorry!"

Edwina entered and, locking the door unexpectedly, ut the key in her pocket.

"What did you do that for?" cried Mrs. Cavil, in visible gitation.

"I shall apologize," said Edwina, "after I have satisfied nyself on a certain point." She went to her writing-desk nd, opening the drawer, saw that Dysart's letters which vere tied in a packet had been removed. "I thought so. You have not had time as yet to read them, and I am orry to have to deprive you of the pleasure. Will you lease return the letters you have stolen from this lrawer!"

"How dare you accuse me of such a thing!" cried Mrs. Cavil indignantly, with every appearance of inno-ence that would have staggered anyone but Edwina, vho knew that the letters were gone, and that no one lse would have been interested in taking them. "What

should I do with your letters, I should like to know—impudent, insulting girl!"

"Nevertheless, you have them," said Edwina equably. "Would you prefer that I should send for Mr. Bainbridge and lay the case before him? Or shall it be Billie, and let it become a case for the courts? I shall fearlessly charge you, Mrs. Cavil."

Mrs. Cavil regarded her with flaming cheeks, then thinking better of it, produced Edwina's little package from her party-bag, and flung it down on the table. "Of course, I can't expect you to understand why I wanted to see those letters. I—I can only tell you that I love Jack Dysart," came falteringly from her lips. "Will you please let this matter rest between us alone? It is not likely to happen again, and no harm has been done since I have not been able to read a line as yet."

"I think," said Edwina, "you must be a sample of one of those girls we find in almost every public school, however select, who pilfers and robs and trades in dishonour."

"Oh!" Mrs. Cavil exclaimed, deeply insulted. "You have no right to judge my life from a little matter of this sort. You are the most dreadfully——"

"So my stepmother tells me when we cannot agree. It is your own fault that I judge you by this small act of dishonour. If you are capable of dishonour, it is reasonable to suppose that you have, long ago, stifled your conscience. Will you leave my room, please?" She unlocked the door and held it open.

"I do beg of you, Miss Hope, not to let this incident go further. I don't mind your knowing that I am madly in love with Captain Dysart," said Mrs. Cavil in pleading tones, fright having humiliated her pride. "It is his

lt, for he has been my lover—and—and no woman o has known such a lover could forget him or desire return to her husband. I am ready to leave my husband him, and he knows it—yet he writes love letters to u—*you*, whom he cannot marry, as he is already a rried man! I told you that, and pointed out the danger, dn't I?"

"You did, but there is no danger. You can see for urself that his respect and love for me have sent him ay. As we cannot meet without danger, he has placed e out of harm's way."

"He must have changed a good deal!"

"Perhaps he has. As I have no wish to spread this screditable incident, you need have no anxiety. ease go."

Mrs. Cavil retired hurriedly, glad to be away from e shame of such an humiliating interview, and Edwina turned to take up her hand at bridge.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE CYCLONE

Jack Dysart's letters, which Edwina had limited to one a week, were her greatest treasures, for though they were not all filled with the love he bore her, nor railing at his deprivation too much, he showed that he was depending solely on her for happiness and sympathy. Without her in his heart he would have had little incentive to live the life of an anchorite in the midst of gaiety and folly. He confided to Edwina that he was leaving the Army as he wished to be free to travel about the country or be his own master. Otherwise, as his brigade would soon be going home, he would have had to go with it. Not for anything in the world would he place the seas between them.

Rumours and gossip sometimes tortured her by the suggestion that he was doing a great deal more than he could ever let her know. It was the test of her faith and she stood it serenely. No one could write the letter he wrote to her, and be false. She had nothing to give him—he was not obliged to deceive her. There was no object in their corresponding if he did not love her truly, so her trust in him was unshaken.

Then came the news that Jack was seen about with an actress touring with a company in the East. Even Basil Bainbridge reported seeing him with her at "Firpo's"

where they were dining. Pearle Bainbridge thought he was at his old game and, not knowing that there was anything but a friendly correspondence between him and Edwina, warned her not to fall in love with such a butterfly.

"He would be a bad spec. for any girl," she said, when they were occupied together with needlework. "He couldn't be faithful to save his life! Be wary, Edwina, and don't let him entrap your untried affections! But how foolish of me! as if you don't know him inside out! It is very sweet of you, however, to write to him and try to influence him for good. It is a fine thing for a man to have a splendid, honourable girl-friend to point out that ideals are not necessarily dead because some women let themselves down!"

It was terrible for Edwina to hear that Jack Dysart was seen so much with an actress, but not for worlds would she write and tell him of the gossip he was creating. Her pride again stepped in and made her silent, only her letters were not so full of tenderness as before. They were merely friendly and gave him whatever news was likely to be interesting.

Then suddenly Rajpahar received news that made all other gossip, for the time, sink into insignificance. It concerned Mrs. Cavil, who was called to Calcutta as her husband had died suddenly of apoplexy.

Mrs. Cavil a widow!

How tongues wagged. Now she would have a chance of securing Captain Dysart, who, in all honour, should make her his wife before the world. Rajpahar waited in excitement for particulars, and all her hypocritical friends wrote her inspired letters of condolence.

When, after a fortnight, she returned to Rajpahar, it

vas understood that she had not the heart to leave India vhile any chance remained of her winning Dysart's traying affections. He was popularly supposed to be upporting an actress who had quarrelled with her nanager and broken her contract. Someone had seen er calling at Dysart's flat, where she remained till late t night.

Edwina suffered in silence, for if these rumours were rue, then Jack Dysart was not worth a single tear. Time vould prove everything.

It was disturbing for Edwina to think that Mrs. Cavil vas now free and able to claim Jack Dysart as her own—t least, to go through a pretence of marriage with him nd be openly his wife. He and she both knew, and so did Edwina herself, that he was tied to Mrs. Cavil for life, and nless he took her they were both unable to re-marry.

Following the return of Mrs. Cavil to the station—widow in deep black—Pearle Bainbridge left for alcutta to prepare the house for the return of her party, eaving Edwina to follow with the baby and *ayah*. Edwina was glad she was to be with the Bainbridges, or she wanted to verify gossip and judge for herself who ad lied. She would see Jack—just once—and he would ot lie to her. She was reluctant to write—letters are ften misunderstood. Things are easier to speak about han to write about, so she looked eagerly forward to he meeting, and was comforted to receive a letter from im saying how he longed for her coming even if it meant hat they could only meet in the presence of others.

It happens that the worst storms known in the moun-ains occur at the end of the monsoons, and one of these roke in all its fury over Rajpahar, with a depression xtending over the greater part of Bengal.

Edwina was alone with the child and his *ayah* when the gale suddenly increased in violence, threatening a cyclone, and in the thick of it she was obliged to give shelter to her enemy, Mrs. Cavil, who had been to the library and was so terrified by the force of the wind round the corners that she refused to proceed further till it abated.

"I am sorry to inflict you with my presence," said she, as she entered the house and gravitated towards the fireplace where large logs burned merrily. "The fact is, I was afraid of being blown clean away! Have you any idea how strong the wind has become? It was nothing like it when I came out."

"Please say nothing," said Edwina, politely. "I am sure Mrs. Bainbridge would be pleased to have you take shelter with her." Watching the wind-swept mountain-sides, she could not help contrasting her present circumstances with the past, when Captain Dysart had been her companion on the lonely hillside. At the villa she was in the lap of luxury, with every convenience and comfort at her elbow; yet memories thrilled her pleasantly.

"Oh! It makes me so nervous," cried Mrs. Cavil. "Of late, I have lost all my nerve and don't feel I can live alone or face shocks of any sort. It is terrible to be told all in a moment that one is widowed." She sighed, and put her stockinged feet on the fender. "I hope I shall not be in your way, Miss Hope. Please don't feel bound to entertain me."

"I have positively nothing to do," said Edwina, settling down to household mending, which had become one of her self-imposed duties.

"Do you know, I do not consider this house is at all safe! Feel how it vibrates in the wind."

"All these houses do. They are built to stand strong winds and storms," said Edwina, comfortingly.

"Still, I often wonder how they don't get carried away to the bottom with a landslide. I have heard of half a hillside disappearing in a cloud of dust, and all unexpectedly!"

"It must be worse," said Edwina, "if half a hillside falls on a house. This one is on a spur, like the best of the station, and has no hill close at hand to drop landslips upon it."

"But it could slide with part of the spur to the valley down there! These ghastly storms give me the creeps."

"Let us not be so pessimistic, but remember how many seasons this house has stood against all weathers."

"Which is no guarantee. I wonder how long this storm will last, and if I shall be compelled to trespass on the Bainbridges's hospitality over to-night? If so, I have no things with me."

"We'll hope for the best," answered Edwina. "If the worst comes and you are weatherbound for a day or two, I can lend you things."

"That is exceedingly kind of you. Good for evil is your motto—though I have nothing on my conscience against you, but the attempted theft of your letters—I suppose one must call a spade a spade!"

"I have quite forgotten that episode!"

"Talking of Captain Dysart," Mrs. Cavil went on, "he's running an actress at this moment. I have not told anyone what I saw, but I don't mind telling you, since you and he are so pally. I wanted very much to see him while I was in Calcutta, and sent him several notes to call on me, none of which he had the good taste to answer or notice. So I did the next best thing—since

the mountain did not come to Mahomet, the Prophet went to the mountain. I went, and what do you think I saw. You could not guess, if you tried ever so hard. I knocked at the door of his flat and a servant opened it to me. He was beginning to parley about his Sahib being engaged, but I paid no attention. There was too much between us for *me* to stand on ceremony with him! Well, I announced myself and found a woman weeping on a sofa and Jack consoling her. He had his arm round her shoulders and his face so near that I could have sworn that he had been kissing her and was interrupted by my entry. The worst of it was," Mrs. Cavil said, dropping her voice, "he was in his shirt sleeves. Now I ask you, doesn't that look intimate? I admit the weather was very warm, but unless a man is very informal in his relations with a woman, even in the heat he wears a coat! Of course, he was not pleased to be caught at his old game and was very short and disagreeable. But I did not mind. He knows, and I know, the claim I have on him, so I am just biding my time."

Her disclosure pierced Edwina's heart like a knife, but she made no sign. Not for worlds would she give Mrs. Cavil the satisfaction of knowing that she was tortured.

"Actresses are very fascinating," she remarked, with dry throat.

"This one was very young and pretty. I heard after that, that he had seen her off on a ship bound for London, and it is common knowledge through the shipping circles that he paid her passage home. Of course, the inference is plain. He wearied of her as he does of all women, and packed her off. That was why she was crying. Oh, dear! Did you feel that?" Mrs. Cavil broke off to exclaim

as the house plainly shook under the force of the gusts, which were cyclonic. "I hate these storms. We are in for days of it, if I don't make a mistake."

They had luncheon together and the day passed in gossip and needlework. Edwina did not want to talk much, her whole being was tense with pain, and she wanted nothing so much as a hearty cry. It seemed that she would have to admit in the end that Jack Dysart was at his old game, while, for some unaccountable reason, he persisted in writing her misleading letters. However, she bore up bravely, saying nothing and leaving Mrs. Cavil to believe that all news concerning Jack Dysart was of no interest to her.

As the storm raged on, sometimes less and sometimes more violently, Mrs. Cavil's nerves were more and more rattled, and she could scarcely sit still. "I shall never go to bed to-night," she warned Edwina. "I keep thinking of a family that got swept away in a landslide, house and all, and never to this day has there been a trace of the dwelling discovered. After they had dug twenty feet into the loose rocks and sandstone, they read the burial service over the spot, and returned to their homes. Think of the hundreds of tons of earth that must have covered that dwelling and the family within it!"

"I wish you would not talk of such gruesome things!" said Edwina, "as I shall also be infected with bad nerves. I prefer to trust in Providence and not be alarmed." She went to a window and watched the low clouds sweep the mountains with intermittent bursts of light rain, while the wind whistled in every crack and made music in the blinds.

Towards evening the rain became heavier and the wind more furious. Every gust shook the house to its

foundations, because, said Mrs. Cavil, it had been built in such an exposed situation. Such folly to build a house mainly for the purpose of having a grand view! The result was that it caught the full force of any wind that was going. She retired to rest for the night on the sofa, fully dressed, and Edwina kept her company, for she, too, began to feel alarmed. There is nothing so infectious as fear, and even the presence of anyone as helpless as oneself is a comfort. She paid frequent visits to Bizzie, who was sleeping soundly, and was glad to be laughed at by the *ayah*, who had a fatalist's belief in predestination.

Thus the night passed, and both ladies were relieved to see the new day, though the weather remained unchanged. Under the greatest difficulty the meals were served, Mrs. Cavil having completely lost her appetite. She seemed like one possessed with a premonition of evil and haunted by the feeling that they would never come through the storm alive.

"I am not usually like this, but my nerve is broken. I am no longer the same person. I used to be so fearless of death; now, the very thought gives me cold feet! This wind will send me crazy," she whimpered. "There! listen to that, you could imagine a wind like that carrying away this villa, bodily, and putting it over the bank. Oh, me! oh, me!" she shivered. "If I have ever been unjust to you, Miss Hope, I do hope you will forgive me. I have been a very unhappy woman for some time, married to one man and loving another—and yet being unable to mend matters. One has to think of the children —and the publicity! I never could face the scorn of the world and—publicity!"

"Please don't worry," said Edwina kindly. "You are only making yourself ill."

"I am a miserable woman, anyway. What is my outlook? I have no happiness to look forward to! My children treat me like a stranger; my husband never loved me after our tempers clashed and I threw things about. I can't help my temper!—I was born with it. And—there is Jack for whom I would do *anything*!—turned against me—hates the very sight of me!" Mrs. Cavil wept into her handkerchief, deeply sorry for herself, while Edwina refrained from telling her that she knew all about the relationship between her and Jack Dysart. "I did not tell you that Jack—my Jack!—put me out of the door of his flat that time I called and shut it in my face!—he and that actress must have gloated together over my humiliation! And yet I love him. I wish I had never let him pass out of my life, but, at that time, after the War, he had been ill and was looking such a scarecrow. He had nothing but his Army pay and a small allowance from his people, so—so—" Her voice choked as she remembered that she need not take Edwina further into her confidence.

It seemed that Mrs. Cavil's premonitions of trouble were not so far wrong, after all, when, in the afternoon, there were earth tremors in addition to the gale, and cracks appeared in the walls of the house. These intensified Mrs. Cavil's fears, till Edwina was scarcely able to quiet her. She wanted to rush out of the house and brave the storm, yet shrank from getting drenched by the rain.

Between running to the nursery to see that all was well, and pacifying Mrs. Cavil, Edwina had much to do. She was on the point of making one of her trips to the nursery when Mrs. Cavil gripped her hands, panic-stricken.

"Oh, my God!—the ground is giving way!—Oh!—look, look!"

At the same time, Edwina, who felt as giddy as if on the deck of a ship in mid-ocean, saw that something terrible was happening, for the cracks in the walls were widening, the floor heaved under her feet, pictures crashed to the floor, and the room was filled with fine dust.

"Run out!" cried Edwina. "Run for your life! I am going to the nursery——"

But she had no chance to say more, or to run to the nursery, for, with a sudden upheaval, what Edwina had thought so impossible to happen took place. In the midst of falling furniture and smashing glass the walls seemed to descend on them both, and she knew no more.

It was one of those startling catastrophies that leave ineffaceable memories. In the years to come, the great earthquake that shook all the houses at Rajpahar and demolished one will be talked of with bated breath.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE CATASTROPHE

The first thing Edwina knew when she recovered consciousness was that she was barricaded in a corner by broken furniture and fallen masonry. The place in which she found herself was roofed by beams and rafters, criss-cross, above her head, low enough to touch, were she standing, and they supported a mass of *débris* which was totally indistinguishable owing to the gloom. This was relieved by a small hole in a corner that let in not only a little light but wind and rain. The rain was already flooding the floor, and the carpet on which she was lying was drenched.

Her mind jumped to the conclusion that Mrs. Cavil's presentiments and prognostications were not unfounded. There had been a landslide and the house was probably lying at the foot of the mountain! But she was encouraged by that hole in the wall, for it suggested, conclusively, that she was not buried under hundreds of tons of mountainside! Mercifully, something had happened to prevent that, and there would be a chance of rescue, once people learned what had happened and came to the rescue of those buried and injured. She hoped, prayerfully, that no lives were lost, but could not help fearing that all were killed but herself. Her mind turned in anguish to wonder how the dear, wee, Bainbridge baby had fared.

He had been playing in the nursery in his *ayah's* care, and might now be dead! It was hardly a time for consecutive thought for others, while the danger of her own position was pressing. Yet she thought all the while of the baby and prayed that it was mercifully unconscious, if buried alive, and would die speedily. She could not endure to think of his terror in such terrible circumstances as she conjured up, after hearing Mrs. Cavil's stories. Mrs. Cavil herself was somewhere in the midst of the *débris* of fallen beams and crushed furniture, and was most likely killed or insensible.

Sounds not far from where she was crouched convinced her that Mrs. Cavil was not dead, and she called aloud: "Mrs. Cavil!"

"Who is that?—where am I?" said that lady's voice, sounding hollow and breathless. "I am in agony—pinned down, and it is wet all round me. What has happened?"

"I—don't quite know. Do you think it was a landslip? What can we do?"

"I can't think!—Oh, my God, can't you help me? I am pinned down! Something is on my legs. Half of me is getting numb and I feel deadly sick."

"I can't see you, it is so dark." Edwina peered into the gloom, past the corner of something that looked like the dining-table raised on one of its legs, the legs of chairs, the top of the sideboard or what suggested it, loose rafters, and a conglomeration of furniture and plaster. Something moved, and she recognized a hand, then Mrs. Cavil's head and part of her body; the rest was lost in the confusion in which she lay.

Crawling through and over a mass of rough obstacles, Edwina made her way, with caution, to the spot, bending

low to avoid the beams which were lower at this point, and she felt with her hands to learn what was keeping the woman wedged and helpless.

It was an iron beam which had fallen from the roof, and Edwina found it impossible to move, for upon it were loads of weighty masonry that defied her strength to handle. Pull as hard as she could, she could not make any impression on the iron beam. Meanwhile, Mrs. Cavil was getting exhausted.

"I will die," she panted, "if I am not released. I will die. Can't anything be done to save me? How selfish everyone is to be shut up in their houses while this horrible calamity has happened to me! You are not using force. Surely you can pull one thing at a time away?"

"I am doing my very best!" said Edwina, kindly.

"I don't believe it. You hate me and will be glad if I die. You have tried to take Jack from me and will rejoice to see me dead, for you hope he will marry you, but let me tell you he will never marry you or anyone, for he loves his freedom and his power to enslave. Oh, the unfairness of this world! That it should be me and not you in this terrible plight! You have nobody, and nobody depends on you, while I have children— Oh, my God! —the agony I am enduring. My feet are cramped—the burning and neuritis are unbearable." She moaned continuously while Edwina grew weak with her unavailing efforts to remove the beam.

"I am so sorry for you—please believe that I am doing what I can—" but Mrs. Cavil had fainted.

It was terrible! Edwina sat back hot and exhausted, her head aching intolerably, and listened to the sounds of the storm. The spray from rain which blew in from the

hole in the roof reached her face revivingly; the wind without sounded like the roar of the sea.

As a matter of fact, the Bainbridges's villa had not slipped downhill, for there had been no landslide. An earthquake of unusual severity in the midst of the storm had shaken the house to its foundations, and it had collapsed—at least, that portion of it in which Edwina and Mrs. Cavil were together had collapsed—leaving the rest standing exposed to the gale.

The *ayah* put her head out into the passage and saw that the rooms beyond had fallen in, and that portions of the roof had gone through to the ground floor. A torrent of rain whipped her face; there were clouds floating through the demolished part of the building just as though the skies had fallen, and the world was at an end! Believing that the two ladies who had remained downstairs had perished, she retired swiftly into the nursery and locked the door, then added to the child's helpless panic by screaming loudly and beating her breast.

As no help was forthcoming, the noise of the storm drowning all other sounds, she came to her senses and comforted her charge with promises of immediate succour. He was not to be afraid, as the good God would care for him and send the Sahibs along, quickly, to take him from the noise and danger.

The earthquake had passed, but the storm still raged unabatingly. In the meantime, the servants, having been aroused by the earthquake and the thunder and vibration of the falling house, there was panic on the premises. They gazed appalled at what had happened, and approached the partially collapsed dwelling with caution lest more of it should fall and bury them alive, as had happened, without doubt, to the ladies. As they

could hear no sound from out of the fallen mass of bricks and beams, they next discovered that the child and nurse were safe in the portion that was still standing; but as the stairs had disappeared, there was no way of reaching them. They fled for assistance from house to house and roused the residents of the neighbourhood, bringing the male inhabitants through the gale to the spot, while their womenfolk remained behind to chatter and discuss the tragic event, and calculate the chances of those buried in the ruins.

It was hard work to dig a way down to the bottom of the mass of bricks and mortar piled high where the fallen beams had formed a tent over Edwina and her guest. It was difficult, indeed, to remove the weight of solid material which was pressing Mrs. Cavil's body to the floor.

Edwina watched the business of extricating her, filled with pity for her state, refusing to leave till sure that she was safe. Her own bruised head and bleeding wounds mattered little. She was deaf to persuasions, feeling that, at any moment, the unfortunate woman would breathe her last. Someone gave her a drink of brandy, someone else covered her wet shoulders with a waterproof cape.

Mrs. Cavil was mercifully unconscious when, at length, she was lifted and carried away on a shutter to the nearest nursing-home, suffering from ghastly injuries.

People commented on the case all around Edwina, their excitement making them indifferent to the pouring rain and driving wind. "She'll never live," said one. "She's badly crushed," said another. "Both legs broken, and I should think internals mucked up

horribly. I never saw such a smash-up!" and so forth and so on.

Edwina was helped into a *dandi* and carried to the same nursing-home, while the child and his *ayah* were taken away by a friend. Too tired to think, Edwina fell into a dreamless sleep and slept off and on for two days, dead to the world. It was enough to know that Mrs. Cavil was in the doctor's hands and well cared for, and that the child was safe. She was very pitiful towards Mrs. Cavil, having witnessed her terrible suffering and been unable to do anything to alleviate it.

While she slept, the wires had been busy and the Bainbridges informed of all that had happened. The evening papers all over India, the same day, published an account of the tragedy and, with the usual journalistic touch, had made it appear that the sufferings of both ladies were unspeakable. One was at death's door, the other only just recovering.

The result was that those interested travelled by the first available train to Rajpahar. Thus, Captain Dysart. Mrs. Bainbridge was with Edwina when she came out of her trance-like sleep which the doctors had encouraged, for a slight concussion had been the worst of her injuries, and from her Edwina learned that Jack Dysart was waiting for permission to call and see her.

"He must see Mrs. Cavil," said Edwina. "Please make him go to her, for they say she might not live."

"My dear! your mind is wandering," said Pearle. "Why should he see Mrs. Cavil? Besides, if Mrs. Cavil is very bad, she is hardly likely to know him."

"It will comfort her to see him," cried Edwina, wishing she could explain the situation fully. Mrs. Bainbridge

did not know the truth concerning the two, and must not know it.

Mrs. Bainbridge learned that Mrs. Cavil was living under the influence of morphia, as both her legs were paralysed and her internal organs severely injured and displaced.

"When she recovers, she will not want to live," said Pearle. "She will be a cripple. When you think of her nature and then try to imagine her a cripple for life, you would say that it will be a mercy if she dies."

Jack Dysart called at the nursing-home in the evening and was allowed to visit Edwina. He came in full of passionate anxiety and dread.

"I came the instant I heard," said he, sitting on the edge of her bed, her hands locked in his. "At first I feared it was you who were dangerously injured, and I can't tell you what I suffered. I knew, then, that whatever happens I cannot leave you again. Darling, you will have to belong to me. I shall be so good to you!" He talked long in his caressing voice of the shortness of life and the needless waste of the precious years if they must be forced to live apart. "It may be wrong from the world's standards, but how many have done it!"

"Listen," said Edwina earnestly, "Helen Cavil is your wife—have you been to see her yet?"

"No. Nor do I intend to go."

"But, Jack, she has suffered agony. She may yet die—and whatever her sins, she loves you to distraction."

"Does that mean that you don't love me now?"

"I do love you, but I am thinking of her——"

"Your enemy?"

"I am sorry for her."

"I am not."

"Still, she is your wife, though no one may know it. You have both done wrong——"

"Don't speak of her when I want you, sweetheart. Have you any idea how I have yearned for you?—how wretched I have been, cut off from you? I went away because I could not allow my selfish desire for you to bring you to harm. But how nearly I lost you by death! I cannot risk it again, so whatever the consequences, we shall go away together, dearest, and damn the scandal-mongers of the world!"

"I once thought that I could do it—but not now," said she, turning aside from his kisses. "I love you, but I would always fear if I did wrong that I would bring a curse, not a blessing, upon our love. Marriage is very different. There is something so splendid in the thought of being joined with the blessings of the Church. It breeds security. It makes for true happiness. If you were inclined towards infidelity, you would remember that I was your most faithful *wife*, and 'play the game'. Otherwise, it would be like before—your writing me the dearest of letters while you have an actress visiting at your flat!" A flash of contempt showed in her lovely eyes and was concealed by lowered lids. "That hurt me badly, Jack. I wondered about it, and in the end had to feel that it was the old you—incapable of being true to an ideal."

"And you loved me all the same?" he temporized.

"I couldn't help that—that is Me."

"The dearest and sweetest girl in all the world," he said. "Now, let me tell you, Wina, that the actress you heard about is my half-sister—not recognized as any relation, because she is an illegitimate child of my

unhappy mother. I never told you that my mother left my father and was divorced. This girl, who has adopted the stage as her profession, was stranded in Calcutta because she would not consent to proposals by the manager which had nothing to do with her contract. The scoundrel has ruined many of the girls who have joined his company, and would have done the same in this case, only she is a decent sort and preferred to be thrown out of work. I thrashed the swine within an inch of his life and took charge of the girl. She's a dear kid, and you would like her. However, I got her a passage and sent her home to her friends. We had met a few times at home, so she was no stranger to me."

Edwina's answer was an impulsive act. She drew his face to hers and kissed him lovingly. "I am so glad you were good to her!"

"And will you believe that I have been faithful to you? That no other girl will ever oust you from my heart?"

"Yes. But I still ask you to go and see Mrs. Cavil. Please, Jack."

"I dread it like—hell!" he deprecated.

"Be pitiful, dear!"

"I have no feeling for her."

"Yet—you have been greatly to blame. You condoned the wrong she did you——"

"First, for her own sake, and secondly, for mine, for I despised her and did not want her back."

"It was bad—bad—*all the time.*"

"You despise me?" anxiously.

"No—but I am sorry about it. Yet, because I have given you my love, I cannot take it back. That, Jack, is real love."

"Beloved!" Tears fell from his eyes as he pressed his lips to her hand. "You have taught me so much that is beautiful and good."

"Promise to visit her. In the midst of her suffering it might give her a measure of comfort to think you were pitiful."

"How can I feel anything but hatred for her when she has stood between you and me? But whatever happens, you must come away with me."

"Never, while she lives."

He looked at Edwina helplessly, because aware that he was dealing with a nature whose will could be inflexible when governed by conscience. And she looked pitifully back at him, for she had arrived at a saner knowledge of life than he. If she had taught him much, he had been the means of her gaining a clearer insight into human nature. The marriage of true lovers was the only safeguard of happiness. Unlawful unions rarely endured. Most human creatures were law-abiding by instinct, though they rarely knew it; that was why the unattainable, when attained in spite of moral and social laws, was no longer desired. If she were weak enough to cast aside the warnings of conscience, and go to him, his once high respect for her, which was the solid foundation of his love, would vanish. With her own hands she will have applied the axe to the root of the tree and, in due course, it would fall to the ground. That was not what she would dare to risk. Better a thousand times to be lovers parted, than together and disillusioned.

It was the last word, and Jack left her to do her bidding. At least, it gave him a measure of happiness to be ruled by her wishes.

The storm was over and a soft wind lifted the curtain in the window of the nurse's sitting-room to which he was shown. Outside, the golden light made the world gorgeous beneath a cerulean sky. It was as if all Nature were giving the lie to the story of destruction and desolation for which she had recently been responsible.

"You wish to see Mrs. Cavil?" the Sister asked gravely.

"I think she might wish to see me. Will you inquire?"

"I shall, in a moment, but—perhaps you do not know that she is very seriously ill. If she recovers, she will be a cripple for life. At present, she is a great sufferer, and fast losing her desire to live."

Jack listened with a show of sympathy, aware that, for Helen Cavil, he had none that was real. She was less than nothing to him, for it was through her that he had learned to despise women and make them his playthings.

Shortly afterwards he was standing at her bedside, expressing his regret for her state.

Helen Cavil looked at him out of strangely indifferent eyes. She knew him, but his personality had receded too far from her through days of suffering for her to be affected by his presence. Morphia had dulled the worst of her pain, but the knowledge that she would never walk again had broken her spirit and weakened her hold on life. She had been through too much, and whenever she had had the power to think she had been like one haunted by the memory of her misspent life.

"Why have you come?" she asked him, wearily. "Is it to punish me more than I have been punished already?"

"Why should I wish to punish you, Helen?" said he.

"Because I have stood between you and happiness so long—because I have made you what you are."

"I have no feeling of revenge, and am sorry you are in such pain."

"You are trying to be kind!—but what an effort!—yet I deserve it all. It has been a rotten game I have played—a wicked trick to save my own skin."

"We have all the same instinct of self-preservation."

"You don't happen to know what I am talking about," she said, in a weak voice, which he had some difficulty in hearing. "You have been under the impression that I was your wife all these years. It was not true."

"What are you saying?" He drew a chair and sat down close to her. What was this new folly? Was her mind wandering?

"We were never married, for I was Cavil's wife before I met you. It is true. He had gone to India and I was left behind, because, at that time, there was the submarine danger, and women were not allowed to travel by sea. So, when—I met you, and you were so keen—you remember?—I got crazy and, for the sake of those ten days' leave and not to lose your respect, committed bigamy. We women never expected our men at the front to live long! I did not dare to tell the truth for fear of gaol, so when you came back—long afterwards—my husband was in England at the time—I asked for your pity and chivalry. I preferred to let you believe I was your lawful wife and that I was sticking to Cavil for the sake of my baby. Women do so much for their children, and you credited me with the mother instinct, so retired like a sportsman. I had

burned my boats—bigamy was punishable with imprisonment, and the disgrace was more than I could have borne. When we met long years afterwards—eight, was it?—memories revived, and I was just as mad about you as before—so—things happened. I have been your curse, and now I am superstitious enough to believe that this is the hell I must endure if I ever hope for salvation. We all make our own hell, one way or another, on this earth, and if I live I have earned mine!—crippled and a log, dependent on the pity of strangers. I have lost my husband, who would have loved me had I loved him; I am a stranger to my children, who are being brought up away from me; and I am despised by the only man I have ever wanted in my life.

"However, it does not matter now. I am past caring for the things that governed my life before this happened to me. Perhaps I may yet die. It would be a merciful release." She covered her eyes with her hand, to shut out the look of illumination in Jack Dysart's eyes. "Would you mind going away? I have told you God's truth, and for you to stay is to cover me with humiliation."

"Good-bye," said Jack. "I don't suppose we shall meet again."

"Best not—if I live I shall go home to my children. Good-bye."

Jack rose with a wildly throbbing heart, wishing that he could cover the ground between himself and Edwina with a single stride.

It took, however, just ten minutes for him to be allowed to return to her room, for nursing-homes have aggravating formalities that cause delays. When he returned, his eyes were dancing, a whimsical smile twitched his

lips, but he held his feelings in restraint. Almost like a boy, he wanted to play with his happiness—to tease and then to confess.

"I have seen her; are you glad, Wina?"

"Very glad!" she replied with wistful eyes that contradicted her words.

"So am I. If it will make you happy, I'll devote the rest of my life to taking care of her. It is for you to command me, dear. I live for your sake and to do all you wish."

"You seem very well content under the circumstances!"

"Virtue is its own reward, we are told. Then—must it be good-bye between us, for ever?"

Edwina's lip quivered, but she did not falter. "It will be the best so, for I—I could not bear meeting you when—when——"

"What about writing? Shall I be allowed to write? You know how I love your letters."

"No—better not," she said, closing her eyes to hide the blinding tears. "It will serve no useful purpose for us to write." The tears forced their way through her lids and rolled down her cheeks.

"And this is final?" said Jack, in a voice that quivered with emotional joy.

"Yes."

The next minute she was clasped to his breast, his lips kissing away her tears, his voice like music, telling her the most wonderful fairy tale she had ever heard.

"And is it all true?" she gasped.

"Dying people don't usually lie, sweet. Mine—mine at last! I am going for the licence, Wina. What day shall it be?"

"To-morrow, if you like, Jack!"

To his disgust a nurse appeared shortly afterwards and he was sent away, for he had stayed too long. But life was full of to-morrows for them both.

Next morning the news flew through Rajpahar station that Helen Cavil had passed away in her sleep.

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